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Overviewing Software Applications for Graphic Novel Creation in the Post-Secondary and Secondary Classroom

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Overviewing Software Applications for Graphic Novel Creation in the Post-Secondary and Secondary Classroom

Abstract

It is well established that the 21st century literate student needs to be able to effectively craft and interpret texts that use multiple communicative modes. Graphic novels are one text type that facilitates such literacy instruction, as the seamless relationship between words, image, and sound (in the form of sound effects) are inherent to the medium. Though there is a wealth of scholarship on the importance of how *reading* graphic novels facilitate multimodal literacy, there is less scholarship on how *writing* graphic novels facilitate multimodal literacy. This article demonstrates not only how writing graphic novels enables multimodal literacy, but also provides an overview of five graphic novel creation applications that could be used in the post-secondary or secondary classroom: *ToonDoo, Comic Life, Graphix Comic Builder, Creaza Cartoonist,* and *Microsoft Word*. For each application, we offer strengths, limitations, and a recommendation for use.

Introduction

Frank Serafini asserts "the world contains visual images and design elements as well as written languages" (3). As such, he goes on to argue that "students need to learn how to read between the borders of visual images as much as how to read between the lines of written text" (3). Writing in 2014, Serafini articulates a line of argument pervading English studies for the past two decades: what it means to be a capable reader and writer in the 21st century extends far beyond being able to read and write alphabetic text effectively. The world—and its reliance on multiple modes of communication working together to convey a message—is not communicatively monolithic. Thus, our writing instruction should better align with the practices found in global communication.

It bears noting that several governing bodies in English studies have articulated the importance of readying our students to be capable communicators in the 21st century. In 2004 Kathleen Yancey (then the head editor of *College Composition and Communication* and universally respected composition scholar and pedagogue) challenged those in the field of composition to recognize the tectonic shift in how we define writing by demonstrating that

writing is no longer *only* putting words on a page (311-312). Not even five years later, the National Council of Teachers of English put forth the argument that proficient 21st century readers and writers should be able to adroitly "create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts" ("NCTE Definition" par. 1). While these quotations are powerful, it perhaps does not do justice to the impact of these words. Consider: *CCC* and NCTE are two of most well respected bodies and voices in the composition studies. They have, for the better part of their existences, been devoted to the written, alphabetic, printed word. For these two bodies to argue for a shift in how we—as a society and educators—ought to perceive writing and literacy is noteworthy. Thus, given the influence that Yancey (and *CCC*) and NCTE have, it is not surprising that the last decade has seen an expansion of multimodal composition scholarship in almost all major composition journals and conferences. We bring this up to underscore the importance of teaching multimodal composition in our classrooms.

One way to facilitate multimodal literacy is through the implementation of graphic novels in writing curricula. There is a wealth of literature that details how graphic novels support multimodal and, by extension, visual literacy skills in students. Rocco Versaci argues that graphic narratives, by their very nature, require readers to actively participate in multimodal analysis through the combining—and subsequent effect of—text and visual. (63-64). Dale Jacobs supports this notion when he notes comics, through their interplay of image and text, are inherently multimodal: "Images of people, objects, animals, and settings, word balloons, lettering, sound effects, and gutters all come together to form page layouts that work to create meaning in distinctive ways and in multiple realms of meaning making" (21).

While there are several fantastic works of scholarship supporting the integration of graphic novels into English curricula to support multimodal reading, there is currently a dearth of scholarship that discusses the benefits of using graphic novels to support multimodal writing. Part of the hesitation to write about this could be due to a misguided perception that the tools (digital and otherwise) and expertise needed to teach students how to write graphic novels are too complicated, complex, or expensive. In this article, we wish to dispel this notion. First, we briefly articulate the benefits we have found in assigning graphic novels as a multimodal writing assignment. Second, we discuss how we've framed our graphic novel writing assignments, paying particular attention to the importance of reading and analyzing graphic novels as a first step. Then, we offer five different software applications available to teachers to facilitate the creation of a graphic novel. We examine the strengths and limitations of each application before offering our recommendation for whether that software is best suited for integration in the post-secondary classroom or the secondary classroom.

Graphic Novels: Multimodal Writing

The importance of assigning a graphic novel creation project stems from the value in multimodal composition instruction; specifically, there is a growing recognition that students need to be comfortable composing using multiple communicative channels instead of the more traditional one (alphabetic text). Ilana Snyder and Scott Bulfin believe that literate individuals must now recognize "how different modalities are combined in complex ways to create meaning. These other modes incorporate diagrams, pictures, video, gesture, speech, and sound. In an increasingly multimodal communication landscape, understandings of language are no longer limited to grammar, lexicon, and semantics [...]"

(809). Here, the authors articulate the various modes that writers should become well versed in and clearly, these modes extend much further than the written word. Maria Lovett et al. continue this line of thought by asserting that "we live in a world that has moved well beyond the technology of ink and paper; a world in which, increasingly, words come off the page" (288). As such, these authors suggest that writers must now become increasingly familiar with "nonprint-centric, multimodal texts" (288). And Anne Wysocki takes this notion one step further, by claiming "To be responsible teachers, we need to help our students [...] learn how different choices in visual arrangement (on screen and off) encourage different kinds of meaning making and encourage us to take up (overtly or not) various values" (186). Though the information presented here offers an incomplete mosaic of the arguments for the inclusion of multimodal composition in writing curricula—other convincing arguments include Kress (2003), New London Group (1996), and Palmeri (2012), among others—the aforementioned scholars and pedagogues paint a clear picture: multimodal composition is part of the present and future for composition studies and should be complementary to traditional writing projects.

Graphic novels blending of the visual, written word, and audio (in terms of "sound effects") make it is a kind of multimodal composition that can be used to facilitate multimodal literacy. There is an amazing rhetorical complexity that reading and producing a comic book requires. When talking about the shift in literacy—specifically the shift to visual literacy—Gunther Kress notes that "*The World told* is a different world to *the world shown*" (1, emphasis original). As Paul Thomas aptly notes, though, comics and graphic novels combine the world told and the world shown by having words and images work in conjunction with one another (31). Perhaps one way to determine just how complex

comics and graphic novels can be is by trying to define the medium; scholars, after all, enjoy endlessly debating definitions. To that end, two scholars—Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* and Thierry Groensteen in "The Impossible Definition"—assert that no definition can aptly or suitably capture the breadth and complexity of what a comic *is*; if there is anything scholars like more than definitions, it is embracing that which can't be defined (case in point: genre theory). That said, Will Eisner does offer a fairly solid analysis regarding the form of comics:

> The format of comics presents a montage of both words and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (e.g. perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (e.g. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit. (qtd. in Thomas 32).

The production of comics is also complex. David Carrier's *The Aesthetics of Comics* gives some indication of the numerous considerations that go into creating a comic. He has chapters on "representation," "the speech balloon," "the image sequence," and finally, putting words and pictures together. Additionally, producers of comics must determine panel layouts, color choices, typography, and image selection.

Comics, then, can support the goals of the new literacies, particularly multimodal literacies. Richard Mayer's conception of new literacy includes both words and pictures (both static images, such as illustrations, photos, and graphs as well as dynamic pictures such as animation and video) (359). And as Pamela Takayhoshi and Cynthia Selfe iterate, multimodal composition is not necessarily a "catalyst in revolutionizing writing instruction" but they do believe that multimodal composition "can help us develop an

increasingly complex and accurate understanding of writing, composition, instruction, and text" (6). Creating comic books can work towards this goal. Determining how to juxtapose word and image is not an easy endeavor. There are several rhetorical choices to be made; for example, a comic creator needs to determine the panel layout for each page. The panel layout not only influences other design issues—such as image and caption size—but also will alter and influence how a reader interprets the piece. Additionally, image selection—including image size, color, shape, etc.—directly impacts the rest of the design (if the comic creator is to create a "flow") but also reader interpretation. Even typography decisions are a challenge. Not constrained by the usual "Times New Roman size 12" comic book creators can play with the visual aspect of font, color, and size; moreover, there are real opportunities to demonstrate the ideas of connotation—a "staple" in the composition classroom. Clearly, there's a lot of rhetorical thinking that goes into designing a comic and seems like a viable form of multimodal composition to assign to students. As Jeanette Hughes et al. note, creating graphic novels in the classroom is "useful in helping [students] develop multiliteracies skills" (603).

Reading Graphic Novels as a Bridge to Writing

It is important to help students understand what goes into writing a graphic novel, as it is much more complicated than students may realize. In the classes we teach graphic narrative, we often begin class by analyzing a short comic book, such as *Detective Honeybear* #1 (see Figure 1), written by Alex Zalben with art by Josh Kenfield. We walk through this text with students first because it is a fun, short example of how print comics fosters multimodality. We stress certain elements in order to show readers can make complex meaning from this one page of graphic narrative. Moreover, it helps students

better understand the kind of rhetorical decisions they need to consider when creating their own graphic narrative. Thus, before assigning any graphic novel writing, we advocate starting the unit with reading and comprehending one or more graphic novels so that students can better understand the possibilities they will encounter when crafting their own project.

Figure 1: ***Detective Honeybear*** **(2013)**

In talking about the visual, one of the first items we point out is the page and the subsequent panel layout, and we discuss how many options a graphic novel composer has when it comes to this. The page background color is black, and when we get to the bottom of the page, we realize that the page is serving as the background for the bottom-most narrative "panel" (we put "panel" in quotes since it is borderless). As a class, we have a discussion about the *effect* that the black page has on the reader, and why the graphic novelists may have made this choice. Some students believe the black page simply signals the time the story takes place—night. Others argue that the black is supposed to conjure up foreboding images, hinting at some kind of sinister plot. Taken in conjunction with the other panels and images, there are some students who cogently argue that the black background helps establish a *film noir* feel, as one element of *film noir* stories is a night-time setting, with the only light emitting from a car's headlights or a lonely lamppost. Thus, this is an opportunity to show that when composing a graphic novel, the page is not a "throw-away," but rather an opportunity to set the tone.

We then turn our attention to the panel layout itself, again noting the myriad options they will have as a composer of graphic novels. One of the first things we discuss is that the three initial panels set us up for what would seem to be a standard *film noir* meets *CSI* kind of story. However, this notion is quickly allayed at the bottom, when we see Detective Honeybear himself make a dramatic entrance. This turns into an excellent conversation about whether this is the best panel layout and why the writer and artist may have designed the panels this way. Students often discuss that the reveal of Detective Honeybear would be more dramatic if it happened on the second page—by revealing the titular character on page one, it takes away from a) the surprise of the reveal b) the impact of the reveal, and c) any dramatic tension that writer and artist may have been seeking in the first three panels. We sometimes invite students to "re-imagine" this panel sequence through storyboarding; this allows students to practice writing graphic novels in a lower-stakes environment, while still further demonstrating how paneling can greatly impact a narrative and the reader's relationship with the text and characters.

Finally, we get to the relationship of images and text. Though we stress that it is possible to tell a narrative through images, we also want students to understand the powerful relationship that juxtaposing image and word can have on both their experience as readers and as writers. Just as the color of the page suggests a certain tone for the story, so do our two speaking characters. By being shrouded in shadows, readers are instantly steeped into a world of mystery; this again draws on fairly common *film noir* strategies (keeping characters in shadows to heighten the suspense) while also drawing on connotation (shadows tend to signify mystery, death, and so forth). Moreover, the relationship of image and text in the first panel helps readers immediately infer that the

two characters are detectives. By hovering over a body (presumably dead, based on the position of the feet and the written text) and briefly exchanging "No leads?" and "Nothing" we can assume these characters are attempting to solve a crime—and given the feet at the bottom of the panel, we can guess the crime at hand is some kind of murder (see Figure 2). This line of thinking is furthered by the prevalence of black on the page and in this particular image. The stylized text throughout this panel—and the next two panels—suggests the two may be speaking in hushed tones; readers might make this assumption based on the italicized text. This is an important point to highlight to students; as they compose their own graphic text, they will need to consider what role they want the written words to play (both visually and semantically).

Figure 2: Panel One of *Detective Honeybear* (2013)

The following two panels furthers (see Figure 3) the idea that readers are entering a mystery story. While the first panel served as an establishing shot—one that introduced readers to the scene—the following two panels enhance the action. We get a better image of the dead body, and a close up of one of the two detectives. His expression is serious, and through the word balloon, we learn that there are no signs of struggle, which seems odd given a) the man is dead and b) he was apparently robbed. The third panel is one our students enjoy talking about. They note the contrast of the two detectives—one tall and skinny in a dark suit while the other is short and squat in a

Figure 3: Panels three and four of *Detective Honeybear* (2013)

lighter suit. We talk about how this might signal a yin-and-yang relationship—a notion furthered by the heart-shaped symbol in the background. Based on the visual cues, students note the differences between the two men, but also believe them to be close partners—that is, they work well together. This third panel also introduces a third character—by way of a balloon with text-type we have not yet seen. Bolded and no longer italicized, readers will perhaps infer that this new character is not worried about keeping a hushed tone. Moreover, because the stem of the balloon is not pointed at one of the two characters, readers can assume that this character is not in the panel. Thus, these conversations help us talk to students about what they can do as writers to enhance the action and add nuance to their own graphic creation.

This leads us to the main panel on the page (see Figure 4). Given its size, it takes on the role of being the narrative center of this page. Two things immediately stand out to readers: one, the character speaking is a bear and two, the bear is in color. As a class, then, we discuss the implications of this decision. We talk about whether this means the character is supposed to be light-hearted (a character who is literally colorful in an otherwise dark, dreary, *film noir* world) or whether the artist just wanted to clearly emphasize that this is the main character. Students also note that there seem to be headlights of a car (keeping with the *film noir* motif) illuminating Detective Honeybear, further underscoring his importance. The textual cues also help in this regard. Our two detectives speak in unison—or perhaps yell in unison, given the size and boldness of the

Figure 4: The Borderless Panel in *Detective Honeybear* (2013)

text. One is not entirely certain if the characters are simply surprised or if this is another move to emphasize Detective Honeybear's importance. We also note that Honeybear is the only character named thus far—the original two detectives remain nameless. These conversations help show students how to make meanings of graphic novels as a reader, but also it offers them possibilities to think about as writers of graphic texts.

Though we broach other topics—including the efficacy of panel-to-panel transitions, the closeness of the panels to one another, and the style of the art-work—this brief discussion demonstrates the complexity of graphic narrative, while furthering the notion that meaning is created in a multimodal manner. That is, while it may be possible to understand this narrative without either the images or the text, the two work well together to establish not only plot and character, but also mood, tone, and setting. This exercise, then, helps students not only become effective multimodal *readers*, but it also demonstrates to them how many choices they will need to consider when constructing their own multimodal compositions (in the form of a graphic narrative). Thus, reading the graphic novel first—and understanding how readers comprehend this complex text-type—is invaluable for students constructing their own texts. As readers themselves, they will better understand the conventions of graphic novels and the expectations that graphic novel readers may have.

Methods

The five graphic novel creation tools that we discuss are certainly not the only tools in existence; for instance, Marvel Comics offers a tool strikingly similar to *Graphix Comic Builder*. Moreover, there are several strictly fee-based applications that are available to individuals as well. However, we had to narrow down which applications to include and

discuss here, as it would be unwieldy to examine all the possibilities available to educators. As a result, we selected *Creaza Cartoonist, Graphix Comic Builder, ToonDoo, Comic Life* and *Microsoft Word* for our discussion. We were already familiar with three of these tools (*Toondoo, Comic Life and Microsoft Word*), as we had previously implemented them in prior classes with success. We learned about *Graphix Comic Builder and Creaza Cartoonist* while preparing for this article. Our end goal in selecting this range of tools was to provide educators with the greatest range of applications possible.

That said, we wanted to ensure objectivity in our tool selection and review. Thus, here we offer a discussion of the methods we utilized. In searching for potential comic creation tools, we cast a broad net to see what software and products were available. Our search turned up an initial list of twelve, which we systematically narrowed following a list of specific criteria (see Table 1). As a result of the review, several tools were removed (see Table 2), leaving us with five to conduct a full review.

Table 1—Software Review Criteria

Categories for Review	Criteria
Ease of Learning (for students)	• Tutorials available for students? • Tool bars? • Intuitive interface? • Pedagogical utility?
Appropriateness	• Secondary classroom use? • Post-secondary classroom use?
Accessibility	• Available for Mac, PC or both? • Ability to save/publish? • Ability to export • Ability to print?

Flexibility	• Limitations in page design?
	• Limitations in panel design?
	• Limitations in image use?
	  ○ Stock images only?
	  ○ Can outside images be imported?
	  ○ Can images be manipulated using filters?

	• Limitations in word/thought balloons?
Cost	• Fee-based? • Educator discounts? • Free trials?
Security	• Student accounts required? • Password protected or use of names? • Projects open to public? • Projects privately saved to computer?

Table 2—Software Removed from Review

Tool Name	Decision	Rationale
Pixton	Removed from List	Required monthly, quarterly or annual subscription
Marvel	Removed from List	Only includes Marvel superheroes; similar to Graphix
Bitstrips	Removed from List	Advertises as more of a tool to create a virtual version of yourself than a graphic narrative
MakeBeliefComics	Removed from List	Limited options; not appropriate for secondary or post-secondary
Comic Master	Removed from List	Limited support and use
Chogger	Removed from List	Not appropriate for secondary of post-secondary classrooms
Strip Generator	Removed from List	Limited options and space

Once we established the list of tools to be reviewed, we thoroughly examined each. We spent at least three hours examining each tool, testing all options, manipulating tools and creating short graphic novels. For each tool, we compiled a list of affordances and constraints in order to determine the appropriateness of each tool in classrooms; this was done in part by responding to the questions we constructed for the software review criteria. As mentioned earlier, we used each tool to create a graphic narrative, from start to finish; throughout the process of creating the graphic narrative, we maintained an ongoing dialogue (through email conversation), discussing the tools we examined and comparing notes. At the end of the review period, we met formally to analyze our experiences in order to construct the most accurate, detailed analysis possible.

For each of the comic creation tools reviewed, we provide a discussion below. First, we offer an overview of the tool. Next, we describe the strengths of the software, with regard to pedagogical usefulness. Finally, we discuss the weaknesses of each tool. Our discussion of strengths, weaknesses, and ultimate recommendation was based on our knowledge of graphic narrative composition and our experience as educators.

Graphic Narrative Software

As we've discussed and demonstrated, graphic novels are one text type that helps effectively enable the multimodal composition instruction demanded of the 21st century English instructor. However, it is beneficial to know what kinds of software applications exist to facilitate the graphic novel creation project. It seems several instructors are wary of assigning this project because they fear the tools that exist are potentially inaccessible, too expensive, or too difficult to use (or some combination of all). There are several software applications of this nature—some of which are free and others that boast a nominal fee. In this section, we highlight five possibilities for software applications devoted to the creation of graphic novels: *ToonDoo*, *Comic Life*, Scholastic's *Graphix Comic Builder*, *Creaza-Cartoonist*, and finally, *Microsoft Word*. For each software application, we offer strengths/limitations of the application, before making our recommendation for its appropriateness in either the secondary or post-secondary classroom (or both).

ToonDoo

ToonDoo (toondoo.com) is a free, fully online comic creator, one that offers many options for comic strip creation through a user-friendly interface. Users can choose from hundreds of comic strip components (settings, characters, props, clip art, and text bubbles) to include in the comic using the drag and drop principle. Each comic component is categorized to help users find what they are looking for and select just the right image; for example, under "Characters," users can choose from ten options (e.g., animals, sports, emoticons). Additionally, users can upload their own images to supplement the stock components already provided. ToonDoo allows users a considerable amount of editing options—reshaping, distorting, coloring, and so forth—which both engage advanced students and scaffold those who require support.

ToonDoo also provides fifteen options for panel layout, from one to four panels of equal or varying sizes. Users also have the option to create individual comic strips or to combine panels to form books (i.e., collections) of multiple strips. These individual comics or collections of comic strips can be published online and shared with teachers, peers, and a broader audience through the use of URL and embed codes. After publishing and sharing their graphic narratives, classmates can provide feedback and comments using the feedback tool.

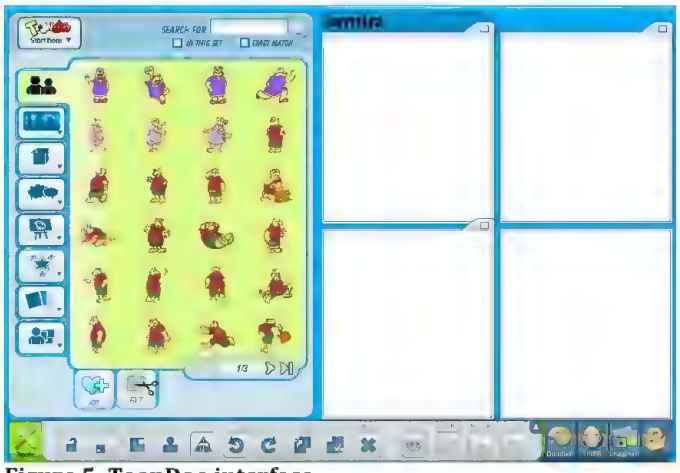

Figure 5: ToonDoo interface

Strengths

The biggest strength of ToonDoo is the large (and free) selection of comic components (backgrounds, characters, props, etc.) available. There are hundreds of

options, more than many other comic creators offer. This selection offers students a wider variety of choices and options as they craft their own graphic narratives. Another strength of this tool is its ease of use. ToonDoo employs a well-designed and user-friendly toolbar that is clearly labeled so that students can spend the bulk of their time creating, rather than navigating the interface through trial and error. Students can also go beyond simply using stock images and characters; they can use the upload and TraitR features to bring in their own images and/or design their own characters.

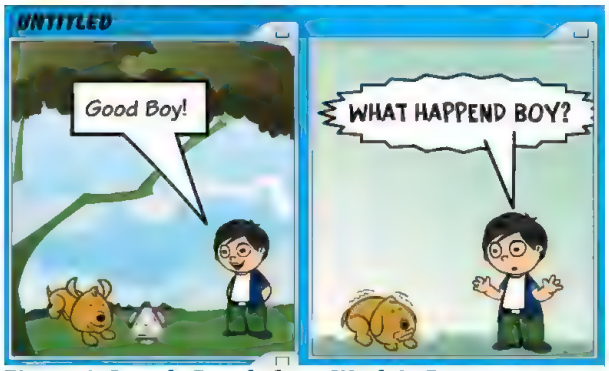

Figure 6: Sample Panels from Work in Progress

Yet another strength lies in ToonDoo's options for saving and sharing products. Students can save works in progress, a huge benefit in composing. This means that students are not constrained to a 50-90 minute class period. Instead they can continue returning to the composition in the same way as any traditional piece of writing. Once a project is complete, students also have several options for publishing and sharing their creations. Depending on the assignment and purpose, students can select from public (where anyone can view), private (where only they can view), and shared (where they can select who views) for their product.

Lastly, ToonDoo provides the opportunity to go beyond creating a one-page comic. Instead, students can combine comics (disparate or related) into collections (i.e., books). This allows for longer and more detailed graphic narratives than most comic creation tools.

Limitations

Though there are many positives for using ToonDoo in the English classroom, there are three limitations we would like to point out. First, using this online tool requires the creation of accounts, including supplying email addresses for all users. This can be a bit of an issue depending on the age of the student, but at the secondary and post-secondary levels, this is less of a problem. If providing student emails is a problem for any classroom teacher, simply contact ToonDoo administration to register an entire class.

Second, the limited options for panel layouts can constrain the kinds of graphic narratives created. This might be frustrating for students who are inspired to create more complex panel layouts—layouts they've seen employed in various graphic novel readings done in class. Though the fifteen panel options are a fine starting point, they lack the imagination of some of the other comic creators available to educators.

Third, ToonDoo offers primarily unrealistic renderings of characters, backgrounds, and so forth—that is, they strongly resemble images commonly found in and associated with comic strips. While this is appropriate for some narratives, it might not be the best choice for someone wishing to tell a more somber tale. At the same time, this limitation offers the opportunity to discuss how images themselves have a "tone" to them—just the same way writing can take on a particular tone. As such, we recommend that teachers spend some time discussing visual connotation and denotation in the classroom.

Recommendation

ToonDoo is a useful tool for both secondary and post-secondary classrooms for a variety of reasons. First, it is free, so cost is not a negative factor. Second, the tools within ToonDoo are both robust and easy to use. This allows for use from novice to expert students and provides a massive array of comic creator options for students to dive into.

Third, students at both levels can create either individual or a collection of comics while engaging in the rhetorical decision making of comic creation.

Comic Life

Comic Life was created in 2005 and offers students the opportunity to make high quality graphic narratives. Students can upload their own photos and/or artwork and drag/drop them into a nearly endless array of panel/page templates. Not liking the template options? Comic Life allows you to design your page and panel designs; as such, it gives beginning graphic novel creators valuable structure, but advanced graphic novel designers have the freedom to be as creative as they like. Comic Life also offers users an advanced array of photo filters to give their graphic narrative a distinct look; these filters are as extensive as Adobe Photoshop's filters, which gives students lots of flexibility when it comes to photo manipulation. Comic Life is available for Mac and Windows through plasq.com, where they also offer an app.

Figure7: Sample Comic Life Page

Strengths

Comic Life is one of the most powerful graphic novel creating programs available to students and educators. While it is not what the "pros" use, the range of layout and text options, the sophistication of the tools, and the overall polish of the program allow students to create documents that look very near to the kind of product they could purchase at a bookstore (see Figure 7). While some might think such a powerful tool is difficult to learn, the drag-and-drop principle is intuitive, and students should be able to pick up how to use Comic Life within a day.

It should also be noted that Comic Life is continually improving. The original version did not allow students to save their work as a PDF, and only allowed them to a) save as a comic life document or b) export each page as a .jpeg file (which was a fairly complicated process). However, this has been improved upon, as students can now save their entire graphic text as a PDF, which allows for easy publication. Additionally, students can share it as an e-book through CBZ or ePub. And of course, Comic Life allows users to share via social media as well. Thus, the options for disseminating and publishing student work are many.

Limitations

Unfortunately, the quality of Comic Life comes with a price. An educational version of Comic Life will cost $20, but this is just for a single computer. A free trial is available to anyone for 30 days, which might cover the duration of a single unit—but after the 30 days, students are out of luck. Moreover, in our experience, it can be difficult to get multiple trial versions downloaded on school lab computers, which typically means that students need to have access to a laptop in order to use Comic Life. While the trial version is complete—that is, it is the same version as what you would purchase for $20—the short shelf-life and the potential difficulties in getting access for students make this a serious drawback.

Recommendation

This would be appropriate for both secondary and post-secondary classrooms due to the intuitive nature of the program. However, our recommendation would be to talk with administrators and Information Technology before you choose this program; if you are buying the program for the school, make sure they are willing to install it on public computers. If you are seeking to use the trial version, make sure they are willing to install

the 30-day trial. Additionally, you need to make sure the trial version is installed as close to your unit as possible, so that students have the most time with Comic Life.

Graphix Comic Builder

Graphix Comic Builder (www.scholastic.com/graphix) is a product of Scholastic Inc., an organization with strong ties to education. Rather than offering an open comic creator, where students could create a multitude of original comics, Scholastic provides users with templates to create comics based on four popular young-adult graphic novels: *Amulet* (by Kazu Kibuishi), *Bone* (by Jeff Smith), *Nnewts* (by Doug Tennapel), and *Smile* (by Raina Telgemeier). All available graphic elements—characters, settings, props, and text—are reproduced from the graphic novels themselves. It is exactly this limitation that offers unique learning opportunities for students.

Figure 8: Panel Layout Options

Even better news for teachers is that access to the website and comic creation tools is free to everyone. Additionally, teachers and students are not required to create accounts linked to student names and/or emails. The program and tools are extremely user-friendly and provide a surprising number of options within each title. For example, users can select from 10 layout options ranging from three to nine panels of identical size and shape to non-traditional options with a mixture of panel shapes, sizes and numbers. Moreover, Graphix uses the drag and drop principle to add settings, objects, characters, and speech bubbles and includes options for users to flip, rotate, move to front/back, and adjust the size of images. The site also

offers a "how to draw" section, in the form of a graphic narrative, from artist Steve Hamaker; users can select from three interactive tutorials: how to draw people, how to draw shapes and perspective, and how to draw animals. These tutorials provide a relevant glimpse into comic art, one K-12 students do not often get in school. When finished, students can print their comic or download it as a jpeg file to their computer.

Strengths

The main strength of Graphix Comic Creator is in its simplicity and ease of use. Teachers and students do not have to be digital or comic software experts to use this tool. In fact, it scaffolds students by including only the necessities for comic creation, while still allowing for the creation of high quality products, and is laid out in any easy to understand fashion. The website and tool design is straightforward enough to engage young learners, yet detailed enough to peak the interest of more advanced students. Requiring students to utilize only images from the book can help them to better engage with what they are reading and to make stronger connections with the text, the author, and the characters.

An additional strength of this tool is that it is fully online and free to use. Because it is an online tool, teachers and technology personnel can avoid downloading tools and software from the Internet. The fact that it is free to use allows teachers to avoid issues of online anonymity and safety, as no names, emails, or other identifying information is required. Finally, Scholastic has strong ties to the K-12 education community, so teachers and administrators can rest easy knowing the site and tool their students are using has been designed with students and learning in mind.

Figure 9: Sample page using Graphix Comic Builder

Limitations

While Scholastic's comic creation software is an overall strong tool, there are a few limitations that teachers should consider before selecting the right tool for their classroom needs. First, because all elements and images are directly from one of four graphic novels, students have fewer choices in the settings, objects, characters, and text they can select. Second, students using this software are more limited in the amount of creativity they can use. By only providing stock images and content from the graphic novel itself, students have fewer options, with regard to characters, props, etc., for their own composition. Third, due to being a fully online, free tool, Graphix only allows for users to print a hard copy or download an image file. This decreases the options students have for sharing their work with others (e.g., via social media, link, embed code); however, much can be done with the resulting jpeg to encourage sharing, publishing, and discussing.

Recommendations

When looking at this tool, we can picture a variety of ways teachers could incorporate it into their literacy instruction at the early secondary level (i.e., 9th grade). The templates provided by Scholastic are from popular graphic novels, especially with younger readers and those less familiar with the graphic narrative and are often used as texts to

introduce students to both the graphic novel format and the process(es) of reading a graphic narrative. Because of this, Graphix offers a unique way for teachers to simultaneously engage their students in both reading the graphic novel and using graphic novel composition to further their reading and literacy experiences.

Creaza Cartoonist

Creaza offers four interactive tools for students, including Cartoonist. Created in Norway in 2007, Creaza Cartoonist (www.creazaeducation.com/cartoonist) is a fully online cartoon creator, providing the tools that allow users the ability to compose their own graphic texts. While a more comprehensive version is offered for a subscription fee, Creaza provides a free version as well. This free version does offer teachers and students an array of tools and possibilities, although the premium account provides additional themes, editing options, and greater storage capabilities.

Within the free version, users can create their own comics and scenes by choosing from various stock backgrounds, characters, props, images and texts. Users can also import their own images and media files into the program to combine with the stock images. Additionally, Creaza provides several options for text bubbles (e.g., ellipse, rectangle, thought, speech, scream). All interactive tools are available through a user-friendly toolbar layout and are used via drag and drop. These tools allow for more than a static experience with images. Teachers also have the choice to assign comic creation exercises to their students in two ways: share the link or send as email. Moreover, teachers can attach media files for students and require a due date. By clicking on the assignment link, students will be directed to that assignment, and it will appear in their portfolio as well.

Strengths

Creaza is fully online; thus, no software installation is needed. Creaza also offers an iPad app, Creaza Cartoonist EDU, for teachers with greater access to an iPad cart, where each student can work with their own device, than to enough computers for an entire class. Additionally, there are many curriculum-based exercises available for multiple grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and secondary) and content areas (e.g., English, World Languages, Social Studies/History, Math, Science, and 21st Century Skills). Within each content area, there are several themes (Creaza calls these universes) available: World War II, Ancient Greece, Manga, among others. Teachers can assign projects to students by simply clicking "assign," selecting a due date, and sharing relevant links with their students. Student projects appear in their dashboard. For teachers of World Languages or those with English Language Learners, Creaza is available in nine languages. Final products can be printed or shared on the web (i.e., class wiki or webpage) via link and embed code. To share comics, students go to their portfolio, click "View and Manage," then "Share," and finally "Publish." Students will then have access to (1) a public link and (2) an embed code, allowing them to choose between publishing and sharing on the open web, via social media and on a classroom-based site. To assist novice users, Creaza has provided a tutorial video demonstrating, from start to finish, how to create a comic.

Limitations

While Creaza offers a fairly detailed tutorial video that is helpful in getting started and learning the basics, there is limited assistance available for users having issues or with questions. Due to the limited access to help from Creaza, this software is perhaps not optimal for those teachers and students new to using digital comic creator tools, especially those who expect to need assistance. Second, because there are relatively fewer layout

options than some of the more sophisticated software (e.g., ToonDoo and Comic Life), students are limited in the number of options for character, setting, color, and panel layout. Additionally, some of the character and prop options are odd/juvenile and require creative ways to use. That said, this limitation provides the opportunity for students to think of unique ways to use these stock images.

Recommendations

While there are many ways teachers can utilize Creaza Cartoonist, we suggest one option that can be used in the secondary classroom. We suggest using the tool as a scaffold for students who are just beginning to experiment with creating graphic narratives. Teachers can create an introductory project for students by taking advantage of the pre-loaded exercises available. For example, for students who recently read a series of science fiction texts, teachers can ask them to create their own sci-fi comic. Using these stock assignments and the more limited options Creaza offers can help students begin to focus on the basics of graphic narrative composition (e.g., pairing relevant images and text, plot design, etc.). Furthermore, the simplicity of the tool also creates a more simplistic design experience with a much more shallow learning curve. Once students and teachers feel comfortable with their abilities to use the tool to design basic graphic narratives, they can then move on to more complex tools and assignments.

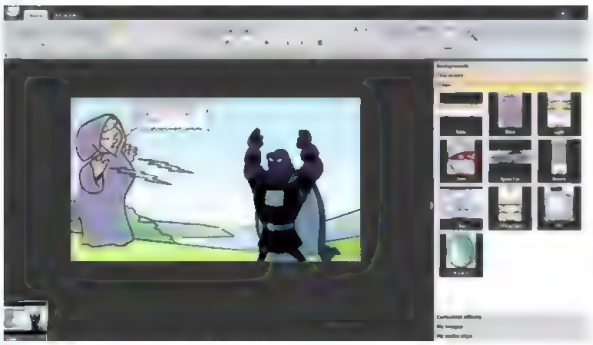

Figure 10: Sample Panel

Microsoft Word

Many people overlook Microsoft Word when it comes to projects other than traditional essays. This is unfortunate, because not only is Word perhaps one of the more prevalent and easily accessible applications, but it has also gotten surprisingly powerful over the last few years. Thus, it is now perfectly capable of being used as a graphic novel creator.

Strengths

Perhaps one of Microsoft Word's biggest strengths is its accessibility. The Microsoft Office suite remains one of the most used purchased software suites in the world; in February of 2015, it was estimated that 1.2 billion people use Microsoft Office. That is a staggering number. Thus, even if students do not own Microsoft Word, there is a very good chance that your institution will have several computers with the entire Microsoft Office suite. Thus, access should not be an issue here. Students should be able to capably do any long-term graphic novel creation project using MS Word and not be able to cite "I don't have access to it" as a reason for its incompletion.

Aside from the accessibility, its familiar interface may prove useful. Since so many students have used MS Word to compose traditional essays, they are more than likely accustomed to seeing its organizational layout. Though they may not be intimately familiar with integrating images—and combining images with alphabetic text—they should at least be familiar with the various tabs, making instruction that much more intuitive. For instance, students should have a pretty solid understanding of where the "layout" tab is. This may cut down on some of the functional instruction that needs to take place.

Projects can easily be saved as well. Students can save their graphic novels as a .PDF or a .DOCX project, which would make transmission via a course-management system or even email very easy. Since many students will be loathe to print these documents out—due to many schools not having access to color printers—being able to share these documents electronically becomes exceedingly important. Moreover, if students were creating a web-portfolio, most website creators are very comfortable working with data files originated from MS Word; for instance, it is very easy to upload a .PDF or .DOCX file into Weebly, which allows students to publish their work. This is not always the case with other comic creators.

Figure 11: Sample Panel from MS Word

Lastly, the other major strength of using MS Word to create graphic novels is that the product is, for the most part, quite professional looking (see Figure 11). The range for design options is quite extensive for such an easily accessible (and easy-to-learn) program. Students have the options to use filters for their images, play around with panel-thickness, create a limitless number of page designs, and also integrate captions, word balloons, and sound effects. In short, MS Word allows students to make the full range of rhetorical decisions—nothing has been pre-determined. There are no templates here (though admittedly, some may perceive the lack of templates as a limitation), which allows students unlimited freedom and opportunity for creativity.

Limitations

The primary limitations of using Microsoft Word are three-fold. First, file-sizes can get a bit big. This is a problem when you are creating any graphic-driven text, but as

discussed earlier, it is less of an issue with any of the free web programs. Second, students need to have a wide variety of photos or images ready to use. This may be a positive if you have the equipment to let students take their own photos. However, with limited "stock" imagery, students will be asked to generate most of their content on their own. This can be seen as a negative, but in our classes, we've generally turned this into a positive (as it is an opportunity for students to increase their visual literacy through taking photographs). Lastly, the use of captions and word balloons—while possible—is a bit clunky. There are limited words you can fit in a word balloon, so characters are usually forced to be a bit more on the silent side.

Recommendation

We think Microsoft Word is a fine option for both the secondary and the post-secondary classroom. In the high school classroom, MS Word is good for (at least) three reasons. First, access to the Internet is not completely necessary (at least for much of the composition process). In our experience, the Internet provided to students in the high school tends to be unreliable. Second, because all high school computer labs and laptop cart computers will have MS Word we feel this software could be seamlessly integrated into the classroom. Similarly, because of the familiar interface, we think MS Word makes the transition to multimodal composition a bit less scary and intimidating. Third, because it is MS Word and not an online tool, teachers and administrators don't have to worry about student anonymity and safety, which is always on the minds of secondary teachers.

For similar reasons, we think this would be a fine tool to use in the post-secondary classroom as well. Some universities are loathe to acquire and install new software on open lab computers—understandably so, as budgets are tight and there is always the possibility

of program misuse. Because MS Word will be available on any computer lab machine, instructors can easily reserve computer labs and not worry about the correct program being installed. Moreover, students can work on this project outside of class with ease, allowing students to spend more time crafting rhetorically sound graphic narratives.

As a final word, we think this could work as both an introductory and advanced tool for graphic novel creation. As we've discussed, the familiar MS Word interface makes this a smart choice to get students' feet wet on graphic narrative creation. Yet the lack of any template forces students to make some difficult and complicated rhetorical decisions when it comes to page design—decisions a more advanced student might feel comfortable making.

Conclusion

As we've noted in this article, 21st century students are expected to be able to communicate using multiple modes of communication, extending far beyond "simply" using alphabetic text. Graphic novels are a way for educators to support multimodal literacy instruction. Readers of graphic novels are asked to seamlessly interpret image, word choice, page/panel design, and sound effects to construct a meaningful narrative. As such, composers of graphic narratives are forced to make complicated rhetorical decisions, such as choosing the right moment for image use, selecting the appropriate text to accompany the image (if any), and determining the best accompanying features (motion lines, sound effects, and so forth) that will help the reader analyze and interpret that specific panel. Not surprisingly, we advocate for graphic novel instruction—both from a reading and writing standpoint—in English classrooms as a way to support NCTE's (and others) notion of 21st century literacy.

To help students and instructors alike with the graphic novel creation project, we've offered a range of easy-to-learn programs that can facilitate this assignment: Toondoo, Comic Life, Graphix Comic Builder, Creaza Cartoonist, and Microsoft Word. While some tools are more effective for the secondary classroom as opposed to both the secondary and post-secondary classroom, all tools offer instructors a way to introduce the graphic novel creation process and as such, introduce students to multimodal composition. We have no doubt that more programs will be created to join the five discussed here today; to that end, we want to stress that these are not *all* the programs that are designed to create graphic novels. However, we find these tools to be some of the more user-friendly, while also giving students enough flexibility to create some powerful graphic texts. Thus, we encourage English instructors at both the secondary and post secondary level to not shy away from using graphic novels in the classroom, as reading and writing graphic novels is one (of many) powerful ways to facilitate multiliteracy instruction.

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Students as Critics: Exploring Readerly Alignments and Theoretical Tensions in Satrapi's Persepolis

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Students as Critics: Exploring Readerly Alignments and Theoretical Tensions in Satrapi's Persepolis

Cover Page Footnote
I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dorothy Sutton, the amazing classroom teacher in this study.

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Students as Critics:
Exploring Readerly Alignments and Theoretical Tensions in Satrapi's *Persepolis*

"I cannot take the idea of a man cut into pieces and just write it. It would not be anything but cynical. That's why I drew it" (Marjane Satrapi on the visual-verbal methodology of *Persepolis* qtd. in Chute, p. 151)

"I think that when you have themes of a certain extent, when they involve violence or difficult subjects so much, you often get to a point when you're writing about them with words, that you just can't keep writing." (an adolescent reader on the visual-verbal methodology of *Persepolis*)

Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, *Persepolis* (2004, 2005), has been the subject of both theoretical, textual analysis and debates of readership. In her book, Satrapi draws from visual and verbal modes in order to depict her childhood journey of living through the Iranian Revolution. As a text dense with historical facts told through black and white images, *Persepolis* invokes the starkness, contrasts, and complexities of growing up in a time of war. The complex composition and story-telling quality, which shows, tells, and ultimately remembers tragedy has been praised by both literary critics and readers. Since its publication in English in 2004-2005 literary critics have examined the structure of *Persepolis* from a narratological stand point. At the same time, American young adults have acted as an actual audience (rather than the one imagined by the author) and interpretive community to this graphic novel in their classrooms. Although it is both a recommended (Carter,2007) and contested (Berlatsky, 2013) text for an adolescent audience, few have examined the reactions and interpretations of 'flesh and blood' readers to it. In this essay I will draw on the voices of both critics examining the structure of *Persepolis* from a narratological standpoint and young adults as a 'flesh and blood' audience (Phelan, 2007, p. 296) and interpretive community (Fish, 2010). As part of a larger, qualitative research study I had the opportunity to observe discussions and interview ten high school

students about their experiences with *Persepolis* in their language arts class. Here, analysis of that empirical data results in a contextualization of critical theory through readers' voices. The empirical data I collected was analyzed along with textual, literary data. In many ways, interpretations of both critics and actual student readers support one another. Further, by reading critic and adolescent interpretation side-by-side, the adolescent voice is elevated and empowered; the adolescent "chaperones the words" rather than receiving another's interpretation (Sanders, 2013, p. 62). Within interpretive communities students *become* critics.

The audience and study

In this study, the audience to Satrapi's *Persepolis* was a group of high school students assigned to read and discuss the novel as an assignment for English class. I had the opportunity to observe discussions within what became an interpretive community. This work took place in a Midwestern public STEM school that is filled by a lottery each year. The students who attend come from urban, suburban, and rural districts as well as varying socioeconomic statuses, so the resulting student body is very diverse. All adolescent readers observed for this study were enrolled in English 11 during the spring quarter of 2013 and participated in a series of discussions around *Persepolis* as part of their English curriculum. Both *Persepolis I* and *II* were assigned as required reading over a two week period. Students were also assigned to generate questions to draw from in Socratic Seminar discussions in class.

The initial goals of this work were to explore issues of gender and culture in literature through a critical lens. In particular, *Persepolis* has been recommended as a classroom resource to engage readers in critical, student-focused discussions (Connors, 2007). Connors, while teaching *Persepolis*, utilized cultural criticism to create ways for students to deal with tension around cultural differences and make strong connections in similarities that seemed buried. And

White (2010) has asserted that *Persepolis* provides opportunities for students to experience and even take on different perspectives, such as students "expected to mourn the soldiers killed" through reading and discussion (par. 4). Critical exploration also occurred with these participants, extending from our focus on gender and culture. (For more information about this unit see Dallacqua and Sutton, 2014) This work also connected to other texts read during that school year; however, this was the first and only graphic novel used in this class. Further, this was the first graphic novel for several of the readers, making for varying levels of experience with this medium among the ten participants.

I was able to document the many perceptions a high school audience brings to a reading of *Persepolis* over that two week unit. During that time reader/participants were encouraged to ask their own questions and connect their own stories with Satrapi's. Their discussions were student led, with no adult interjections. The quotations from adolescent readers used here are pulled directly from those recorded discussions, as well as from follow-up interviews.

My analysis examines issues of audience, narration, color and style, and form, exploring and questioning popular, common, readings of *Persepolis*. Placing the voices of adolescent readers alongside critics' illustrates that aesthetic reading can result in nuanced and analytical work. This work positions young readers as critics. For educators, this serves as evidence for time and space for young readers to transact with complex texts such as *Persepolis*. By making room for an aesthetic reading experience, stemming from reader response theory, educators create opportunities for critical reading and deep engagement.

Audiences to Memories

As an acclaimed and best-selling book, *Persepolis* has attracted a wide audience, first in France, and now translated and read all over the world (although not in Satrapi's home country of Iran). This popularity, especially in the United States, encourages an examination of the

authorial audience, "the author's ideal reader" and actual, flesh and blood reader: "each of us with our glorious (or not so glorious) individuality and common human endowments" (Phelan, 2007, p. 296). The authorial audience, I argue, includes Satrapi herself, those like her, and further extends to an audience willing to participate in remembering. Throughout this text, the theme of remembering is returned to again and again, through promises and departures. By the end of the first book, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Marji is forced to flee a war-torn Iran. At the airport, Marjane's father's parting words to her are "You've got to go now. Don't forget who you are and where you come from" (Satrapi, p.152). The narrative that proceeds and succeeds from this moment takes the form of memories of a younger Satrapi, retelling a childhood and a history of her country.

There are moments when Satrapi draws herself as audience, complicating the layers of authorial audience literary critics have explored. For example, at one point, upon meeting and spending time with her Uncle Anoosh, a young Marji serves as an audience to his life stories, promising, "Don't worry, I'll never forget" (p. 60). In this way, *Persepolis* acts as a kept promise, a way of remembering for herself. Yet, Chute (2010) points out that her story also "pushed outward to consistently visualize publics – collectivities of people – aside from herself and thus shifts the narrative attention to a broad public sphere" (p. 139). Satrapi does not only tell her story, but the stories of others. In a vignette titled "Heroes," readers meet Siamak Jari and Mohsen Shakiba, family friends imprisoned as revolutionaries who have recently been released. Marji sits in and listens to their stories of torture, again an audience herself. We share her perspective and her imagined images of others' stories as they are told. Satrapi is not remembering just for herself but for her family, who directly asks it of her, and for the people of Iran, whose stories Satrapi witnessed. As Chute (2010) notes, she "places the self in dialogue

with a collectivity: Satrapi frames her text to address those, like herself, who are exiles from Iran" (p. 141).

The authorial audience goes beyond this narrow description. In fact, Satrapi has noted that *Persepolis* "is an attempt to explain Iran to the West, hopefully bringing the two together using humor" (Tempesta, 2014, para 11). Satrapi spends a great deal of time and space retracing her country's history in the opening of her novel. She does not assume a shared experience and sense of history with her readers, instead educating her readers about her country's past. Told in comic form, *Persepolis*'s dense and difficult story becomes more approachable, inviting a larger audience (Constantino, 2008).

Further, by choosing to tell the story through the eyes of her child self and the voice of her adult self, Satrapi extends her memories to a wider authorial and implied audience, beyond herself and beyond Iranian exiles. Younger audiences can connect with an adolescent Satrapi, who is also concerned with maintaining friendships, finding clothing she enjoys wearing, breaking rules, and other adolescent struggles. When Satrapi learned that her book, which focused so thoroughly on the trials of adolescents, was being removed from Chicago classrooms because of torturous images she commented, "seventh graders have brains and they see all kinds of things on cinema and the internet" (Soupporis, 2014, par. 3). Satrapi's ideal, authorial, reader seems to take her invitations to remember with her, regardless of age or experience. She educates us on her valued history in a form that invites readership, assuming that readers will participate in continuing her tradition of remembering.

Young audiences have actively taken up this task of reading and remembering. *Persepolis* has become a popular text in classrooms (Carter 2007; Connors, 2007), providing an actual, real-life audience perspective. Exploring readings of classroom audiences invites a

reader-response theoretical approach, "bring[ing] with it a whole new set of facts to which its practitioners can now refer" (Fish, 2010, p. 344). Reader-response theory argues for the importance of the reader and what they bring to the reading of a text. Rosenblatt (1978) concludes that a text is "an event in time" occurring when the reader brings her "past experience and present personality" to it (p.12). As readers engage in interpretive strategies as a social experience, the text becomes, "not a spatial object but the occasion for temporal experience" (Fish, 1980, p. 345). Different readers at different times will, based on their own histories, interpret texts differently. The text, which forms in the moment of interpretation, what Rosenblatt(1978) calls the 'poem,' is based on agreements an interpretive community has come to (p. 12). This interpretive community relies on "presently recognized interpretive strategies for producing the text" (Fish, 2010, p. 347). Their community is based on in the moment discussion, but also common goals and "a core agreement…concerning the ways of *producing* the text" (Fish, 2010, p. 342). In short, an interpretive community is a group of readers who work together with common tools and aims for reading a shared text.

As noted earlier, student participants in this study represented a diversity of backgrounds and experiences with reading graphic novels, all of which were drawn on during reading and discussion. They acknowledged being part of a wide audience for this text. Even more, the students agreed that the comic form also invited them to be audience to this story. One particular reader, who identified as both American and Palestinian, connected deeply with this graphic novel and Satrapi as a Muslim female, working against the grand narrative of being identified only as oppressed and as a victim (Dallacqua and Sutton, 2014). This reader aligned closely with the authorial audience, feeling empowered and called to remember her own stories of her family living in poverty, some choosing to leave Palestine, some choosing to stay. Other readers

connected to the theme of growing up and the difficulties of maneuvering school, friends, and parents. Readers worked to draw parallels between being a teenager in the U.S. and in Iran, "like…when people break dress code" one reader pointed out. While they didn't identify as closely with Marjane's life, these readers still noted that they engaged with the text because the central character was an adolescent too. One reader, noting the graphic novel form, explained, "It allowed the author to get her opinions out there into a wider range of people. I thought it worked well." Collectively, this group of adolescent readers believed that the form of the text made it more "approachable" and even enjoyable. Here, they too align with critics like Constantino, and join the continuously growing audience of *Persepolis.*

Narrating memories

Satrapi invokes multiple narrating forms to explore her memories, which is commonly explored through literary criticism. Using the narratological concept of focalization, critics have explored these multiple narrators. "Narratorial focalization in particular is neither necessarily nor exclusively concerned with consciousness presentation, but with the filtering of *all* events and extents in the storyworld" (Horstkotte and Pedri, 2011, p.335). Satrapi establishes multiple lenses through which to filter events. For example, an adult Satrapi is the primary narrating perspective throughout the printed text of her novel. This printed text appears alongside images of herself as a child, which includes her memories and imaginings through her younger narrator lens. Satrapi established these narrators on her first page writing: "This is me," and drawing a ten year old cartoon version of herself, speaking both in present tense and in retrospect (Satrapi, 2004, p.3). Chaney acknowledges that

> such a paraphrase asserts that the author function…is an unequivocally seamless identity that coheres over time. In this way, the author function that spans

> decades assumes visibility in the Iconic shape of the little girl, who in later panels speaks to us (in speech balloons) from the enunciating space of the present. Implicitly, adolescence is the iconic language of timeless authorial identity, the young girl in Persepolis is Satrapi's archetypical storyteller (p. 27).

The combination of past and present on the page contributes to the complexity of the story and interpretations of it.

Images from the young narrator often suggests "a child's too-tidy conceptualization of 'mass' death" (Chute, 2010, p. 149). This conceptualization is evident in her drawing of 'Black Friday' on page thirty-nine, where "there were so many killed in one of the neighborhoods that a rumor spread that Israeli soldiers were responsible for the slaughter. But in fact it was really our own who had attacked us" (p. 39). Chute describes Satrapi's structural drawing, with lines and layers of bodies blending together in the thick, black ink on the page: "the bodies are stylize against a black background, filling up the frame… mass death in Satrapi's work looks architectural" (p. 149). The words on the page are narrated by a voice of one who already knows who is responsible for these deaths, told in retrospect. But the image is the imagination of a child, trying to comprehend death at such a level.

Perhaps one of the most well-known pieces on focalization and *Persepolis,* Horstkotte and Pedri's (2011) *Focalization in Graphic Narrative,* points to page forty-three and the interpretation of the snake framing the panel in the first volume of the graphic novel. According to Horstkotte and Pedri, this "shift in visual vocabulary indicates a subject inflection of the narrative and thus focalization" (p. 337). Here, readers must question the aspectuality of the panel: Is the snake a representation of young Marji's confusion and frustration of the many changes in her world? Or does it symbolize what the older narrating Marjane knows, that war is

coming? While Horstkotte and Pedri argue that the panel is focalized through the experiencing - I, they also stress that focalization "almost always invites the reader's inferential activities" (p. 339), therefore calling attention to images and multiple narrators and leaving it for the readers to interpret and decide. Therein, exploring narratorial voice lends itself to reader response transactions.

While the adolescent readers did not take up the vocabulary used by critics above, they took note of the various perspectives that the multiple narrators provided in their own interpretations. One reader called attention to the illustration on page forty-five of young Marji imagining what it would be like if her mother "nailed [her] ears to the wall" (p. 45). The image, in a thought bubble above Marji's young head, shows a second Marji in full, her ears stretched out, each pinned to the wall with a nail. Her imagined self wears a troubled frown and her arms lay defeated at her sides. The imagining Marji thinks to herself, "Wow! It would hurt a lot." In this panel, students saw two Marjis drawn, and also note that they are both drawn by a third, narrating, retrospective Marjane. The high school readers discussed the various facial expressions on the faces and what the images, focalized through a young Marji's imagination and drawn retrospectively, contribute. As one student reflected: "You can get more detail in the way that she's thinking. Because if you're in a ten year old… if you're in their mind, you're gonna be different. You're gonna see different things." Drawing from what they know of a ten year old's imagination, these readers noted the diverse perspectives, based on the lens through which it is provided. They, too, realized that through the lens of an adult, the imagined image would have been 'different.'

As the story continues, this lens shifts as Marji ages. The readers in this study also noted the shifting and maturing of themes and language. Beyond the theme of war, Marji, as she ages,

experiments with drugs and sex, cusses, and questions authority with more force. "You can see just how her thoughts change and how she's getting older, besides just seeing her thoughts change *once* she gets older," one reader pointed out. The shift in Marji is gradual. As these students read, they noticed seeing her grow up, mature, and change. And as her character ages, the narratorial voice also shifts.

Moreover, readers called attention to the layers of narration. As an autobiography told through words and images "you're actually seeing how the author wants you to see it," one reader explained. Here this reader was noticing the multiple narrators and the ways in which Satrapi controls the images we read. The reader continued: "If it's real life situation, like, thing, I think it's better to have it like this." As an interpreter, this reader acknowledged the freedom she has to make meaning with the text, taking ownership by forming personal opinions about the text structure. In fact, all readers focused on details, questions, and opinions in the book that were important to them. At the same time, they appreciated the choices made by the author, providing multiple levels of narration for us to "see how [she] wants [us] to see it." Reading this way becomes a transaction, "a two-way process involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268). The readers negotiated meaning between the text, the author, and their own personal experiences and opinions. Through those transactions they arrived at complex conclusions regarding the text's narration.

Memories in Black and White

Along with the overall structure and composition of *Persepolis*, the use of flat, black and white images and understated artistic style also adds to the rich meaning of the text. Some scholars argue that this artistic style communicates ideas more clearly (McCloud, 1993). The style is another aspect of the book that has been explored by critics and readers. Chute argues

that Satrapi drew on her cultural background, influenced by Persian art and its flat, shadowless, images. Satrapi's artistic choices of thick black ink in stark contrast with the white surface do not include shades of grey. Images are therefore bold and complex, at time abstract, but also straightforward.

Writing about comics structure, McCloud (1993) notes that there is an amplification that can happen through the simplification of images in a comic (p. 30). Characters drawn in this iconic style invite readers to see themselves in characters and stories rather than make readers "too aware of the messenger than the message" (p. 36). Further, drawn "in black and white, the ideas *behind* the art are communicated more directly. Meaning transcends form. Art approaches language" (p. 192). McCloud argues that, structurally, simplified images and the lack of vibrant colors invite the reader to focus on the meaning of the story, not just the art. Groensteen extends this argument further, asserting that the "plasticity of comics, which allows them to put in place messages of every order and narrations other than the fictional, demonstrates that before being an art, comics are well and truly a language" (p. 19). Drawing from a more narratological perspective to examine the artistic structure, we are able to see the style and color are operating as communicative tools, as a language.

This language is evident throughout *Persepolis*; it creates an undeniable tension throughout the text that is reflective of the story content. Lefévre (2011) explains that readers arrive to readings of graphic novels with prior knowledge. "An average reader has seen thousands of images and has learned to associate a cartoon style with humorous content" (p. 16-17). This assumption, in the case of Satrapi's graphic novel, further contributes to the tension, as it utilizes a more minimal, cartoon-like style to remember a story full of pain, not humor. Davis (2005) describes the text's art and style as "eloquently convey[ing] both childhood innocence

and indescribable pain" (p.271). This palpable tension exists through the entire text. Gardner (2011), drawing from narratological theories to examine line, argues that the line in comics also contributes to the style and meaning of the story, "roughly analogous to diction and syntax" (p. 57). The thick lines of black and white on the pages of *Persepolis,* then, are part of a language that is communicating such tension and emotion.

Chute further argues that this style and contrast is the act of representing memory on the page. She writes:

> Satrapi's stark style is monochromatic – there is no evident shading technique; she offers flat black and white…. The visual emptiness of the simple, ungraded blackness in the frames show not the scarcity of memory but rather its thickness, its depth; the 'vacancy' represents the practice of memory for the author and possibility for the reader (p. 144).

Chute acknowledges the process of remembering for the author, as well as what that might be like to participate in those memories as readers. Satrapi's stylistic choices purposefully hold and release memories, while elevating them to a level that goes beyond being realistic. Satrapi, herself, has commented on her style and lack of color:

> Violence today has become something so normal, so banal – that is to say everybody thinks it's normal. But it's not normal. To draw it and put it in color – the color of flesh and the red of the blood, and so forth – reduces it by making it realistic (Satrapi qtd in Chute p. 146).

For Satrapi, using color and drawing realistically was not an option. Examining assumptions about the use of color in comics and graphic novels, Baetens (2011) notes that "colorization can be experienced as trauma" (p. 113). In Satrapi's case, "black and white is chosen for other

reasons" (Baetens, p. 112). A realistic, traumatic display of violence could not honor her memories and the memories of others. This was a story to be told in black and white. Gardner (2011) also notes that the "graphic narrative…does not offer the possibility of ever forgetting the medium, losing sight of the material text or the physical labor of its production" (p. 65). In its style, form, and black and white lines, *Persepolis* is also forcing us, as readers, to remember the existence of the author and the truth in her story. Her story, then, invites the readers to engage in "literary transactions" with the author and the text (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268).

Adolescent readers take up the style and black and whiteness of the pages in similar and diverging ways, compared to literary critics. One student added to the argument that the black and white images contribute to the tension of the themes in the book, reflecting on major events in Marji's life, such as her conversations with God: "I feel like that's not a very black and white thing." Readers noted the complexity of Marji's life in contrast with the black and white that often symbolizes clear cut paths and answers. Still, this reader also acknowledged that the "black and white [is] just kind of symbolizing, I guess, what she's going through, cause she has a lot, she has a lot of ups and downs." Along with creating tensions, the black and white, for this reader, further supported the content of the text and the jarring changes from highs to lows that Marji experiences.

Readers also interrogated the use of this specific color palette. While Satrapi noted realistic images would not do her story justice, readers wondered if the understated images without color minimized the trauma. Readers generally noted that the black and white format made the depictions of war easier to read, understand, and digest. While this format invites a wider audience, these readers took time to also question the choice. One reader discussed page fifty two, which depicts a man who has been executed and cut into pieces. The image shows

clean lines between severed body parts, no blood, the body surrounded only by black ink. "It, like, shows in a way what they did. They cut him to pieces, and it shows what they did to him, almost in a way that children can see it and, like not be freaked out by it." As this graphic has been removed from schools because of its violent themes (among other mature topics through the book) the idea that it could be given to children seems extreme. Yet, this reader, drawing on his own discomfort with violence and gore, appreciated the lack of detail and "how it was in black and white." Another reader was troubled by this, commenting that

> …her story is pretty horrific, I mean the things that she went through. And the fact that she put it in comic book format made it easier for me to deal with…It made us see it better, clearer….But, um, at the same time, I think it led us, like, to believe, to be too casual with it….It doesn't really, like, portray such horrific scenes as detailed as we would in our minds.

Literary analysis of *Persepolis* marks Satrapi's images and lack of color as drawing attention to trauma and war, acting as a language to communicate tension and tragedy. However, this student questioned it, wondering if it contributes to a callused attitude towards violence.

This style of artwork added to the tensions of horrific content and understated imagery, yet still provided opportunities for the readers to approach more tragic or complicated events. Deadly bombings or drug abuse did not destabilize readers so much that they were unable to engage with or analyze the text in a critical way (Dallacqua and Sutton, 2014, p. 44). Instead, these readers engaged in deeper aesthetic reading associated with reader-response theory, taking time to notice, "not simply the abstract concepts that the words point to, but also what those objects or referents stir up of personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes" ((Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 269).

Through critical analysis and discussion, these students posed engaging questions and made connections as they transacted with this text.

Memories in Comic Form

The comic form was arguably a necessary choice to tell Satrapi's autobiography, especially to achieve the goal of remembering. Chute (2010) describes this process of 'never forgetting' existing in the book "through its layers of verbal and visual narration: it presents the procedure, in addition to the object, of memory" (p. 143). Further, the autobiographical graphic novel has been described as inherently communal, connecting authors with readers deeply (Gardner, 2012, p. 131-132). In choosing this form to remember, Satrapi is sharing personal experiences and linking herself to her audience through her images, words, and form, therein inviting that "two-way process" between a reader and a text (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268).

What's more, the comics form calls for a particular kind of reading. Readers must work and participate in the telling to make connections between image and text, and between panels. McCloud (1993) focuses on the reader throughout his explorations of the pieces and parts of comics, underscoring the importance of the interaction that takes place between comic and reader. He argues that comics "command audience involvement" (p. 59) and that audience must actively contribute to the reading process: which includes filling the gutters and finding links (or disconnects) between image and text. All stylistic choices, according to McCloud, should be about propelling the story forward with the readers in mind (p. 68-69). Groensteen (2007) also argues that comics are a system that "offer[s] the reader a story that is full of holes" that lends itself to a collaborative interaction between text and reader (p. 10). Although Groensteen is primarily concerned with the structure of the comic, he acknowledges that there is a reader that must participate in the story-telling, hence the purposefully structured format. This type of

reading requires detailed looking and reading, making it an aesthetic experience. Readers "must slow down enough to make the connections between image and text and from panel to panel" (DeKoven qtd in Chute, 2010, p.9).

Readers (and participants from this study in particular)when engaging in aesthetic reading, are not "blank tape[s]" ready to receive information, but actively involved in making meaning from the images and text of *Persepolis* (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 10). Through this process, they became part of the remembering. Kiefer (1995) describes this aesthetic reading process in relation to young readers with picturebooks, arguing that analyzing a picturebook should involve "explaining how the art conveys meaning, rather than just categorizing the pictures according to periods of art history or identifying their relationship to the text" (p. 117). In comics, this process can be much the same. Meaning comes from images, not just from their relationship to the printed text. As was noted above, comics often act as a language (Groensteen 19). That language encourages active exchanges between reader and text.

In observing adolescents' discussion of *Persepolis* I found that both the images and the text provide valuable and necessary information for the complete telling of this story. For example, one adolescent reader noted the small detail of characters' hair showing and how that influenced his interpretation of them, and further, his interpretation of cultural expectations placed on women. In this case, it was acknowledging Iran's questioning of women as sexual beings, with a need to prevent pregnancy, as well as the cultural expectation of woman to cover themselves and their hair, as not to distract men with their bodies. He discussed his surprise that certain minor characters would be so against Marjane using a contraceptive, drawing on images to support his thoughts: " It's surprising, 'cause like, even some of them now, in this picture, like almost all of them are showing their hair. So it's even more surprising then, 'cause they're

being, they're going against the rules there, too." These details were only available in the images of the text and were not obvious. Instead, the female clothing in this image seems to blend into the background, while the bolded text and facial expressions draw readers' attention. This reader's close reading attests to the meaning making potential with graphic novels read aesthetically, as it encouraged him to take note of complex cultural differences and varying degrees of gender expectation.

The content of the story also relies on a comic form to accurately and clearly tell the story. As I pointed to in the epigraph, Satrapi discusses the need to draw her stories, describing page fifty-two specifically. "I cannot take the idea of a man cut into pieces and just write it. It would not be anything but cynical. That's why I drew it" (Chute, 2010, p.151). For her, comics were the form needed to tell the story. The adolescent readers' discussion of the format of *Persepolis* carried a similar sentiment: "I think that it's necessary. I think that when you have themes of a certain extent when they involve violence or difficult subjects so much, you often get to a point when you're writing about them with words, that you just can't keep writing." This young reader echoes Satrapi's hesitation about writing violence, acknowledging the limitations of text. And this understanding surfaces from a deep, collaborative, and aesthetic reading of the text that contributed to adolescent readers' meaning-making. Fish (1980) notes: "If you begin by assuming that readers do something and the something they do has meaning, you will never fail to discover a pattern of reader activities that appears obviously to be meaningful" (p. 345). These students were given time and space to read and discuss slowly and aesthetically. As one adult in the room, I assumed that students would have meaningful thoughts, ideas and connections with this text without my own interjections. As Fish suggested, I discovered impressive work being done with this text, work that stands alongside critical literary analysis.

Conclusion

Literary critics have taken up readings of *Persepolis* in many capacities, elevating the comic form. The intersection of narrative theory and comic studies "draw[s] attention to the great variety and imaginative power of graphic narrative practices" (Gardner and Herman (2011) p. 12). Critical conceptions of *Persepolis* encourage nuanced readings and provide a clear appreciation for comics as a work of art and storytelling. Here, critic's words worked as a tool for me to examine and acknowledge adolescent discussion in a new light. Viewing literary critics' words alongside an adolescent audience reminds us of the power of literature, how it might be interpreted, and the potential that layers of storytelling brings for meaning-making.

Young readers took the opportunity to read *Persepolis* slowly, acknowledging the complexities of a visual autobiography, noting details of the images and text, making valuable connections with the text and each other. Rosenblatt (1982) reminds us that "precisely because every aesthetic reading of a text is a unique creation, woven out of the inner life and thought of the reader, the literary work of art can be a rich source of insight and truth" (p. 276-277). While their observations spoke to theory that they were not privy to, adolescent voices both validated and complicated common theories of this text and the story it tells. Their voices show that these kinds of complex graphic novels, when read slowly and aesthetically, result in critical analysis. In this way, young readers became critics, gaining interpretive authority and agency over their reading experience. Ultimately, these adolescent voices brought theories to life, providing evidence for the deep reading and insightful responses that aesthetic reading in interpretive communities cultivates.

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Mallory Makes Meaning: How One 8th-grader Made Meaning with a Graphic Novel

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Mallory Makes Meaning: How One 8th-grader Made Meaning with a Graphic Novel

Today's young readers have a multitude of choices regarding the genre and even the format they want to read in. One of the increasingly available formats is graphic novels in all genres. Young readers appear to be flocking to this format and even educators are starting to see the value, both literary and educational, of the format as well. Even with the increased reading in and use of this format, little research has been conducted that explores how young readers read in the graphic novel format. This article discusses how one young reader, Mallory (pseudonym selected by the participant), read a graphic novel.

There is very little published research on how readers, especially children, read and respond to graphic novels. There is agreement that "…the format itself creates a different reading experience" (Nel, 2012, p. 450), but few research studies explain exactly what this difference is and how it is experienced, much less the process young readers go through as they read a graphic novel. Even those steeped in the world of comics, including in their creation and reading, are unsure about what occurs during the reading of a comic book. For instance, Eisner (1996) suggests that

> In comics, no on really knows for certain whether the words are read before or after viewing the pictures. We have no real evidence that they are read simultaneously. There is a different cognitive process between reading words and pictures. But in any event, the image and the dialogue give meaning to each other—a vital element in graphic storytelling. (p. 59)

This study aims to answer the following question: How do intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers make meaning with texts in a graphic novel format? In addition, this study explored the following three sub-questions:

- What modalities do intermediate grade readers rely on to make meaning with a graphic novel?
- What strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text?
- What do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work?

This article presents the findings for how one young reader, Mallory, made meaning with a graphic novel.

This study used four approaches for gathering information. First of all, while reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, the second book in the popular middle-grade graphic novel series by Kazu Kibuishi, Mallory completed a think-aloud during which she reported what she was thinking as she read. Verbal protocols have been recognized as a valuable way of constructing initial theories or understandings of a process. "[P]rotocol analysis may first contribute to the initial building of theories that represent progress in the understanding of reading. These theories help us chart a course of the work that remains to fill the gaps in this understanding, and protocol analysis serves ably in the second role of focused research tool" (Afflerback, 2002, p. 89).

As completing a think-aloud while reading a book is a unique experience I conducted one practice think-aloud session with each participant prior to the actual think-aloud. This practice session followed the same procedures as the actual think-aloud, which are described below. The only difference was that participants read a different graphic novel during the practice session.

At the beginning of the think-aloud I read the following directions to Mallory. "As you read this graphic novel, tell me what you are thinking as you read. I want you to tell me anything

and everything you are thinking as you read. This thinking can include your ideas about the writing or the pictures or even the layout of the book. Please tell me your thoughts as you have them rather than waiting for the end of the page, section or book. Don't try to explain your thoughts now as we will discuss them when you are finished reading, so just tell me what you are thinking as soon as it pops into your head. Do you have any questions?"

I audio-recorded the entire session and used each participant's selected pseudonym. I made notes on my copy of the book as each participant completed the think-aloud. The purpose of my notes was to record what participants said on each page so that, when I listened to the audio of the session, I would know what page elicited each comment. I also noted any physical actions I noticed the participant doing; these notes included times when pages were read quickly or when a participant flipped back to previously read pages. I did not interrupt the think-aloud unless a significant amount of time had passed since the last comment. I allowed the participants to read for as long as they desired. Mallory chose to finish reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

At the conclusion of reading Mallory participated in a retrospective think-aloud. During the retrospective think-aloud, the researcher posed questions to Mallory about what she said during her think-aloud; the purpose was to clarify her comments and to gain a more in-depth understanding of her thinking while reading. The retrospective think-aloud was different for each participant, as the questions were based on comments made during the preceding think-aloud. Although the questions and topics were different for each participant, the goal was the same—to understand more fully what the meaning making process was for each participant while reading the selected graphic novel. The questions strove to do a number of things, including, revealing what in the graphic novel may have lead to a comment, understanding what the participant was thinking when the comment was made, showing how the participant came to an understanding that was revealed in a comment, and clarifying comments that were confusing.

The retrospective think-aloud process began during the second meeting with Mallory and concluded during the third and final meeting. Prior to the last meeting, I listened to the recording I made of session two. I focused on noting confusions, intriguing comments, predictions, and other ideas that I wanted to know more about from each participant. The retrospective think-aloud process gave each participant an opportunity to explain their thinking around comments, confusions, predictions, or other responses made during the original think-aloud of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. The focus and length of each retrospective think-aloud varied by participant because it was based on each participant's individual think-aloud.

Mallory was then asked questions that were specific to *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. These questions focused on areas that might be confusing or areas that I, the researcher, sought to focus on as potential sties of meaning-making. Some of these questions were broad, such as, "What do you think is the theme of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*?" Other questions were narrow, focusing on specific pages or panels. The purpose for asking this set of question was two-fold. First, by asking all the participants the same questions about the text, it provided an opportunity to compare answers and thinking across participants. Second, I was able to identify particular portions of the text that I wanted to hear more about from each participant, specifically how they made meaning with a certain part or whether they could identify and provide explanations for unique qualities of some sections.

Finally, each participant was asked interview questions that focused on themselves as readers and readers of graphic novels. The purpose of this interview was to get a sense of each participant as a reader, with such items as, "Describe yourself as a reader." Additionally, the

questions sought to gauge the participants' ratings of themselves as readers of graphic novels. Finally, I hoped to uncover the participants' feelings about graphic novels in relation to texts in other formats with questions such as, "Some people don't think that reading a graphic novel is 'real' reading. What do you think?" The final interview question, "Is there anything that you'd like to say about participating in this research project?" elicited generally positive comments about participating in the project and the research itself.

The larger study included four other participants. While each participant's responses were valuable and interesting, Mallory's responses were particularly insightful, hence the focus on her and her responses in this article.

Below I present the findings of Mallory's think-aloud, retrospective think-aloud, *Amulet*-specific questions and interview.

Mallory

Mallory was an 8th-grader who was poised beyond her years. She was an avid reader as evidenced by the frustration she expressed during the interview about often having more books that she wants to read than she has time for. She was extremely thoughtful in all of her responses. She was well-versed in current popular young adult literature and also knowledgeable about "classics" such as *Lord of the Rings*. She was able to draw many parallels from the fantasy graphic novel to both *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*.

Mallory does not usually read graphic novels, although she has read the entire *Bone* series, a graphic novel, which is over 800 pages long. She was able to use this experience in her reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She often referred to *Bone,* especially when similarities occurred to her. She liked graphic novels, but preferred texts in a "traditional" format because she liked to construct the images in her head. She said, "I don't know why, I just…I have a thing for…umm…the use of sort of description in words rather than in pictures. I like that. I sort of like to do that too, like I am not hugely visually artistic whereas I love to describe things. So I think it's a personal preference that I just like the traditional literature better" (Mallory's quotations maintain the language and grammar used by her).

During the interview, I asked Mallory if she thought that graphic novels offer a different experience from other types of books. She responded, "Yeah, I do, definitely. It gives you like a very…vivid, but preexisting mental image. It leaves some room imagination of like your own mental images, but I think less so than other things."

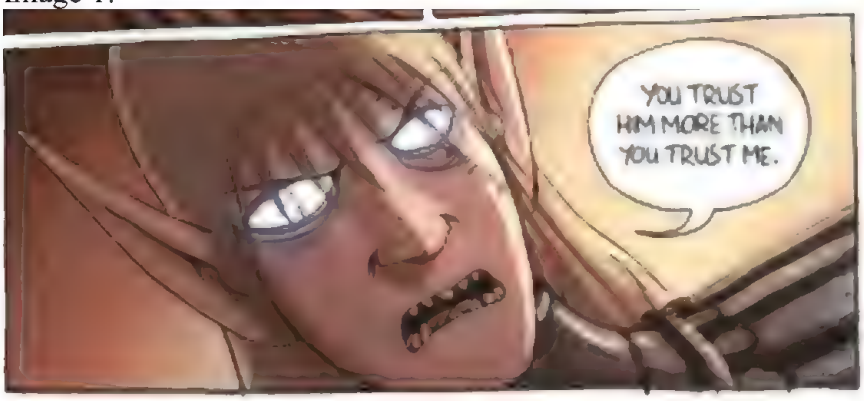
Think-Aloud

Over the course of about 35 minutes, Mallory read *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and completed the think-aloud. She made 63 comments during her think-aloud. A majority (42) of her comments displayed her use of different reading strategies to question and talk to the text.

Modalities. In her think-aloud, Mallory appeared to favor the visual modality, as she referenced information that was only available in the images 28 times. She commented on information only in the text 18 times and information available in both modalities 13 times.

Visual. Twenty-eight of Mallory's comments referred to information presented visually. On page 6 (see Image 1) Mallory commented, "The art around the eyes is really cool because you can tell they are glowing a bit." She was referring to the eyes of the elves. All of the elves are drawn with large, pupil-less white eyes. Instead of a pupil there is a vertical black line that bisects the middle of each eye. The art around the eyes does make them appear to glow. Mallory noted this visual element in her comment.

Image 1:



Text. Mallory referred to information from the written text in 18 of her comments. On page 47, Luger is preparing to use a cannon on the hospital in order to attack Emily. Trellis, the elf prince, says to Luger, "What about the patients? They have no part in this." Luger replies, "Sometimes sacrifices must be made for the greater good." Mallory commented, "It seems that the prince of the elves has some sort of conscience." The information Mallory commented on is only available in the written text; Mallory used that information to make an inference, regarding a character attribute, that the elf prince has a conscience because he is showing concern for the innocent patients in the hospital.

Both. On pages 116 and 117 (See Image 2), Navin and a slug-like warrior have snuck back into the robot-shaped house via the trash chute in order to reclaim it from the elves. Navin and his companion are making their way up the stairs in order to restart the robots. As Navin is busy working with the equipment, an elf comes up behind him. This information is shown in both the images and the text. Mallory commented, "The elves are on board still." She integrated information from both the visual and the written in order to determine the presence of the elf.

Image 2:

Summary. Mallory's comments indicated her ability to access information from the visual, the written text, and from both modalities in order to make meaning with the text. It is important to note that she also demonstrated her use of reading strategies in both modalities.

Reading strategies. Forty-two of Mallory's comments exhibited the use of some reading strategy, including often questioning the text and, in several instances answering her own questions. For example, on pages 90 and 91 (See Image 3), Leon instructs Emily to find a weapon. She declines the offer of Leon's sword and asks, "How about this walking stick?" In that case, Mallory asked of the text, "Does she really think that she can fight the elf king/army with a walking stick?" On page 92 (See Image 4), Leon answers Emily's question. "Very well. It should be adequate for our purposes." Mallory's next comment was, "Guess so." In this instance, Mallory asked a question of the graphic novel and, when she received the answer, a page later she answered her own question. This is an example of Mallory's interaction with the text. Many

of her comments indicated that she was in a constant "discussion" or interaction with the text, in which she asked questions of it and sought answers. She also made seven predictions, which she looked to confirm or deny as she continued to read.

Image 3:

THEN WE MUST WORK SWIFTLY.
EMILY, YOU WILL NEED TO CHOOSE A WEAPON.
I CAN OFFER YOU MY SWORD.
WHY DO I NEED A WEAPON?
IT WILL ALLOW YOU TO HARNESS YOUR POWER AND FOCUS YOUR ENERGY.
KEEP YOUR SWORD.
HOW ABOUT THIS WALKING STICK?

Image 4:

Graphic novel conventions. There were two instances in her think-aloud when Mallory referred to a convention of the graphic novel. Immediately following the scene described above Leon begins to show her how to use the power of the amulet and how to focus its energy through her walking stick. After many tries and failures, Emily is finally figuring out how to do this. As she does, the amulet activates and begins talking with her. On pages 106 and 107 (See Image 5), the amulet is talking with Emily in her head, and Emily is using the power of the amulet to lift increasingly larger items, including the large log upon which Leon Redbeard is standing. In two panels, Leon has a speech bubble filled with squiggles and no words. Mallory commented, "Why can't she hear anything the fox is saying?" This is another example of Mallory questioning the text. The conventions of the format allowed her to recognize that Emily cannot understand Leon because no words appear in the speech bubble.

Image 5:

BUT ONE'S QUEST FOR POWER IS TOO IMPORTANT, RIGHT?
I LIKE THE FOX MAN. HE HAS A DESIRE TO FIGHT.
=!
LET'S SHOW HIM WHAT A POWERFUL ALLY HE HAS.
OOF!
EMILY!
STOP!!!

The second time Mallory referred to a convention in her comment, she paired it with another reading strategy, that of making a text-to-text connection. The climax of the book occurs when Emily and Leon engage in a battle with the elves. Luger loses control to his amulet and morphs into a terrifying giant, who forces Emily and Leon off a cliff. Luckily, the house-shaped robot, piloted by Navin, is there to catch them. Navin, controlling the house-shaped robot, continues the fight with Luger while Emily recovers. The house-shaped robot is being pummeled and has lost both of its arms. Emily musters her strength and uses the power of the amulet to bring the house back together in order to defeat Luger, forcing him over the edge of the cliff.

This expenditure of energy is so taxing that Emily faints, which is shown on pages 202 through 205. The four pages are from Emily's perspective. Page 202 is without panels. The top third shows an image of Navin and Cogsley looking concerned. Navin says, "Don't worry! We'll go get help!" The image is in the shape of a flattened oval, or what the scene might look like from the perspective of an eye that is closing. The middle of the page shows a slightly modified image of Navin and Cogsley, but less of them is shown, as if the eye is closing. The bottom third of the page shows just a slit of light, as if the eye is almost shut. Pages 203 and 204 are completely black. The reverse happens on page 205, with just a sliver of the scene (in this case the inside of a room) being shown, then gradually revealed as the eye opens further.

Mallory commented, "It's the same thing. It's from the perspective of the main character when the lights kind of go out." Several things are indicated by this comment. First, Mallory recognized that the panels on these pages are from Emily's perspective. Second, she realized that the "lights go out" when Emily faints. Finally, she made a text-to-text connection to *Sidekicks* by Dan Santat, as a similar scene, using the same conventions, occurs when one of the characters is knocked out. This serves as an example of how graphic novel conventions can convey meaning and how reading graphic novels can "teach" one how to read other graphic novels, just as reading a traditional novel "teaches" one how to read others. Mallory was able to apply her experience with a different graphic novel, which used the same convention, to her understanding of these pages of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse.*

Summary. Mallory's think-aloud was punctuated with demonstrations of her use of reading strategies. She did not hesitate to question the text throughout her think-aloud and, perhaps more importantly, she continuously sought the answers to the questions she posed to the text. This demonstrated how she used questions to monitor her comprehension and to refine, as needed, her predictions. Additionally, Mallory applied reading strategies to information in both modalities.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

Mallory's think-aloud was filled with demonstrations of reading strategies that she used to make meaning with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse.* In her retrospective think-aloud, she did not discuss these reading strategies. Instead she spent a great deal of her retrospection exhibiting her story knowledge and discussing several text-to-text connections that she made in her reading, particularly to *Lord of the Rings*. She also referred to how the visual, the written text, and the graphic novel conventions helped her to understand the story.

Modalities. In her retrospective think-aloud, Mallory referred to information from both the visual and text modalities in order to explain her thinking and meaning making process.

On page 159 (See Image 6), Emily and Leon Redbeard are engaged in a battle with Luger, who has allowed his stone to take control and has morphed into a giant. In her think-aloud, Mallory noted that the color of the stones has changed, and she wonders about the reason for that.

> A: You remark that the light from the stone has changed from pink to blue and you wonder if it is a bad thing.
>
> M: Maybe it is the light from his stone that is blue on 159. Yeah, I think it is the light from the other stone that causes this blue green color. I think that it just represents the difference between them and it might represent like a…like a personalization of each…like of how each stone is different…but it could…and how each relationship between stone and stonekeeper is different. But it might also just be a tool so that you can like see which…oh wait no…on 161(See Image 7)…the light that is surrounding her does turn green.

A: And that continues on 162 (See Image 8).

M: Yeah and so I think that does mean that the stone is allowing itself to become evil or something or she is allowing it to become unstable…something like that.

A: Okay. So the change in the stone's color that it is projecting may indicate that it is changing from good to evil?

M: Perhaps, yes.

Although there was some initial confusion regarding whether the stone's color is actually changing, Mallory did eventually identify that the color of the stone changed and she provided a feasible explanation for this. Mallory was tuned into the color of the images, and used this information to add to her initial understanding of the events in the story.

Image 6:

Image 7:

DOOM!
HE IS MUCH TOO POWERFUL.
IN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL YOU ARE OUTMATCHED.
THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY FOR YOU TO DEFEAT HIM.
YOU MUST GIVE CONTROL TO THE STONE.
AAAAH!
KRAK!
AGH!
SZRAK!
SZT!!!
EMILY!
GIVE IN TO THE STONE!
LET IT TAKE AWAY YOUR PAIN!
SZRAK! KRNCH!
UNH!
KLANG!
NAF!!

Image 8:

EMILY, GET UP!
GET UP NOW!
I'M THE ONE IN CONTROL!
ACCEPT THE STONE'S FULL POWER BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
AND YOU WILL DIE HOLDING ON TO IT!
LET THE STONE TAKE OVER AND MAKE YOUR TRANSFORMATION COMPLETE!
162

During her think-aloud, on pages 100 and 101 (See Image 9), Mallory hypothesized that the amulet has some heat attached to it. I asked her how she came to this conclusion during her retrospective think-aloud. Emily is learning to use the power of the amulet during these pages.

A: You remark that…or speculate that the amulet must have some sort of heat connected with it. What made you think that or feel that?

M: Oh, umm. It said, 'infuse the staff with the power of the stone. It will help you focus the energy. But it'll burn it like the seeds.' So like obviously there is some sort of connection…if the amulet is able to burn things it probably has some sort of heat because generally when you are burning something it uses heat. Heat is necessary to do it.

A: And is there any way the amulet looks or something that implies heat or…

M: Umm…it's kind of a warm color but I didn't really think about it until I heard that it could burn things.

Mallory appeared to get this information exclusively from the text, as she quoted it at some length. When she was asked directly about the image of the amulet, she conceded that the color that surrounds it could be considered warm, but also noted that she had not recognized this during her reading, or not until she read that it could burn things.

Image 9:

LEON, I CAN'T DO IT.
YES, YOU CAN.
TRY AGAIN.
BUT THIS TIME, TRY USING YOUR STAFF.
HOW WILL THIS HELP?
TOK!
MISS EMILY,
YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS BEFORE.
YOU LIFTED ME WITHOUT BURNING ME, REMEMBER?
YOU SEE?
YOU ALREADY KNOW HOW TO DO THIS.
INFUSE THE STAFF WITH THE POWER OF THE STONE.
IT WILL HELP YOU FOCUS THE ENERGY.
BUT I'LL BURN IT, LIKE THE SEEDS.
100
BUT WITH MISKIT, IT'S DIFFERENT.
HOW SO?
I-I DON'T KNOW. IT JUST IS.
AND WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?
BECAUSE! I DON'T WANT TO HURT HIM, I WANT TO PROTECT HIM.
HE'S A LIVING THING.
WELL, SO IS THIS SEED. NOW PROTECT IT.
IT'S NOT THE SAME.
BUT IT IS.
SOON, YOU'LL COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYTHING HAS A LIFE FORCE...
SOME LIVES ARE EASY TO DETECT.
101

During her think-aloud, on pages 66 and 67 (See Images 10 and 11), Mallory remarked that the amulet was not a good thing. I asked her why she said that, and she responded with:

> Umm…well…I think it was because she sort of like…well…first of all it turned her eyes red and red eyes are usually like a sign of not good things. And also, he said, 'okay,' like on this other page…umm…he says, 'I can use the stone. But what if you can't control it? What if you hit Leon by accident?' And she says, 'I can do this.' 'Okay, but you have to be careful.' So obviously it has some potential for not being controlled. And also when she like starts to like use the power, Leon says, 'Oh, no,' like in like something bad is going to happen.

I asked Mallory to explain why red eyes are not a "good thing." She elaborated, "Well…usually…I don't actually know, but just in a lot of…umm…like literature and movies and stuff when they want someone to look evil they give them red eyes. I think it has become like a signal."

Mallory's explanation of why she thought the amulet was not a good thing was based on information from both modalities. She paired the visual information of Emily's red eyes with parts of the text to come to the conclusion that the amulet was likely not entirely good. In her explanation, she also exhibited the use of the reading strategies of inference and story knowledge. She inferred that, if Emily is warned to be careful with the amulet, there is potential danger. Mallory also applied her experience with red eyes in other texts, including movies, to determine that red eyes are generally not a signal of something good.

Image 10:

Image 11:

Summary. In her retrospective think-aloud, Mallory continued to demonstrate her ability to access information from both modalities. She made connections between the text and other texts in order to understand the potential meaning behind the changes in color, particularly when Emily's eyes turn red.

Reading strategies. Although her use of reading strategies was not as prolific as their indicated use in her think-aloud, Mallory still referred to several reading strategies during her retrospective think-aloud.

Graphic novel conventions. A few pages after the scene above, on pages 106 and 107 (See Image 5), Emily is starting to gain some control over the power of the amulet and the walking stick she has decided to use as a weapon. She becomes extremely focused on what she is doing and struggles to maintain control of the amulet. Emily is not aware of her surroundings, and, when Leon tries to talk to her, she either cannot hear him or ignores him. Mallory commented on this during her think-aloud.

A: You say, why can't she hear anything the fox is saying? How do you know that she can't hear anything the fox is saying?

> M: Well, the fox is…he has a speech bubble, but there aren't any actual words coming out; like it is just squiggles. So generally that means that it is too quiet or just to signify that he is saying something but she can't hear him. So I think that I just said that because of the speech bubble.

Mallory succinctly described what is happening with the fox and his speech balloon. She recognized that the convention of the speech balloon indicates a sound or that something is being said. She also identified that the squiggles within the speech balloon cannot be read and that, in general, this means inaudible speech. She concluded that, even though the fox is talking, he cannot be heard or understood because there are no discernable words in the speech balloon.

Text-to-text connection. Several times during her think-aloud, Mallory referred to other texts, including *Lord of the Rings*. I asked her what she saw as some of the parallels between *Lord of the Rings* and *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She replied, "Oh…that was along with the…uhh…necklace and there was like something on it. It's…it's…and one person has to bear it and another person is sort of…that she travels with is kind of wary of it…and then there's sort of a third like renegade type person who…umm…sort of knows more about it than she does. So I just felt like that had some connection." Mallory's knowledge of this familiar storyline may have helped her to understand *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and to make predictions about story events and character actions.

Summary. Mallory's text-to-text connection between *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and *Lord of the Rings* went far beyond similarities between events in the two texts. Mallory made a connection between characters, or character tropes, in the two books. She also demonstrated her ability to recognize the storyline as common and was knowledgeable of some of the key elements of these storylines, such as the role that power often plays in these stories.

Amulet-Specific Questions

Mallory was able to provide an accurate and detailed summary of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. Her summary followed a chronological order and included little details from the story, as well as big-picture events and themes.

Story elements. Mallory labeled *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* as an action-adventure story. I asked her if she could identify the theme. She responded, "Kind of a story of courage…I guess…and family in some ways, but I don't know if that theme will carry on throughout the rest of the series because it's definitely there in this book, but not necessarily…it might not be in the rest of them, but so like courage and family."

Mallory was able to provide examples of elements of the story's plot, such as rising action and the climax. She indicated that Emily's training and her climbing of the mountain to retrieve the gadoba fruit are instances of rising action. She labeled the battle with the giant elf as the climax of the story. The resolution follows this battle, when Emily and Navin defeat the giant elf and their mother wakes.

Format. Before transitioning to specific elements of the graphic novel format, I asked Mallory some broader questions about format. I inquired how the graphic novel format affected the story of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She replied, "I think it allows the story to have…kind of a very…it…it has a very kind of visual like…it allows it to have like fun visual elements in it. And also…umm…kind of like lets it be a story that doesn't require a whole lot of text or dialogue. Like you can kind of know what's going on without a lot of words."

Graphic novel elements. After Mallory had selected a random page from the graphic novel, I asked her if she could name the parts of the page. She named the following: panels,

speech bubbles, illustrations, page numbers, and "the dividing things between the panels" (gutters).

Panels. I asked Mallory to explain what panels are used for.

M: I think they're used for point of view and just sort of like being able to show different like parts of the story itself. And you can like show action that's moving quickly and like jumping from like different like not necessarily scenes, but parts of a scene.

A: How is that done?

M: Well, you can sort of like jump sort of…you can get a sense of like action and abruptness by like going really abruptly from like one point of view to another and like sort of making it…umm…jump around a little bit…like the view of the reader.

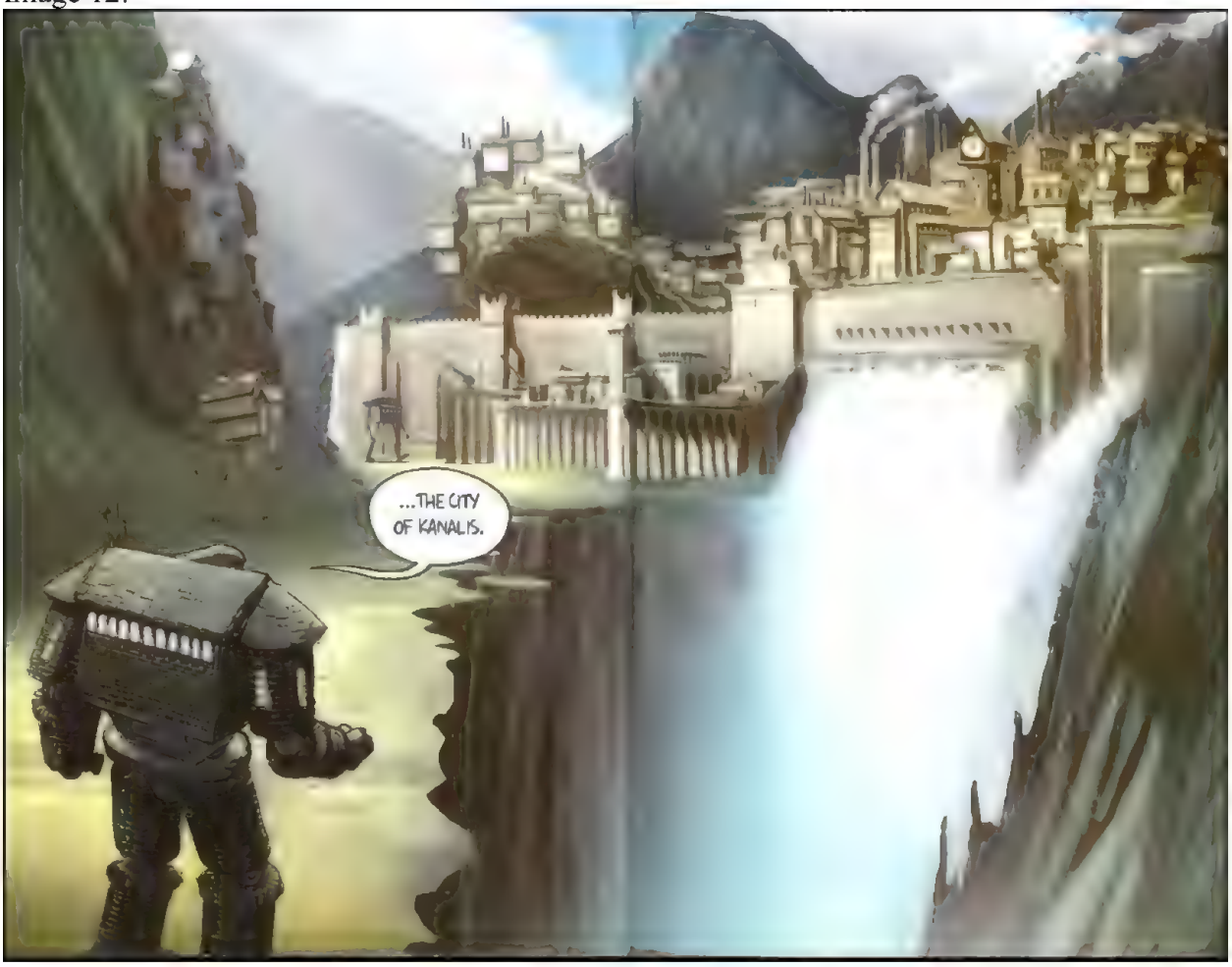
A: How does that happen abruptly?

M: Well…I mean…I think like when if you start out from one distinct point of view and then you sort of move slowly like to an opposite point of view it's less abrupt and when you like jump to that opposite point of view it can give a sense of just kind of like…like a sort of bumpy ride…kind of…"

I directed Mallory's attention to pages 22 and 23 (See Image 12). These are the panel-less pages that show Emily and her group, in the house-shaped robot, encountering Kanalis for the first time. I asked Mallory why she thought this page did not have any panels. She answered, "I think it's to show a wide perspective and also to be able to have a full…kind of like…a full color image, it sort of gives it a very like vibrant feel I think. And kind of an unlimited feel, like it's not limited by the panels, it's just like there and it is. More than like with a panel you get a very specific point of view, with this you just get like, this is the city. It's just kind of there."

I pointed out to Mallory that the illustrator could have placed a border around the image on pages 22 and 23 and made one major panel. She disagreed, saying, "Yeah, but I think that the reason that they didn't do that is because when it doesn't have the border it gives the sense of like…not necessarily infinity, but that it is not…it is huge. It is not able to be contained within these sort of layout type design borders. So even though it doesn't effect the story it still…it…I think that psychologically it kind of gives this like feel of not being bound."

Image 12:



I asked Mallory if her reasoning applied to page 171 (See Image 13) as well. Page 171 shows Luger, in giant form, towering over the elf prince. Mallory agreed, stating, "Yeah, because they are trying to show this giant thing and it's sort of…it's….like even in the story it's supposed to be like not…like uncontrollable. So it gives it this like sort of like humongous, uncontrollable feel. I think it's the same thought applying again here."

Image 13:

In order to discuss another type of panel layout, I drew Mallory's attention to the panels on pages 61 through 68 (See Image 14). The rooftop battle between Emily and Leon Redbeard and the elves is displayed on these pages. I asked Mallory to describe the panels on these pages. She said, "They're more like…they're not straight. The lines aren't straight. I think that's to show like action and like kind of mania in some ways. It's not like…like it's very action filled. It's all like going crazy and so even the layout goes kind of crazy. So it's like…I think it's just to represent this action and also to like…and umm…movement kind of…cause the scene…cause the actions are jumbled together and so are the panels."

Image 14:

Summary. In this discussion of the panels, Mallory displayed her understanding of some of the different roles that panels play, as well as some of the different meanings indicated by panels. She noted that the shape of the panel can convey a feeling—in this case, mania. She also explored the idea of panels as a means of limiting a scene, so that when panels are removed, a particular scene can appear infinite. Mallory was also conscious of the use of panels as a means of showing different perspectives or changing perspectives.

Gutters. In her labeling of the parts of a graphic novel page, Mallory identified the gutters, but referred to them as "dividers." I informed her that they are called gutters and then asked her what they are used for. She responded, "I think they're used to contain the umm panels and show the breaks between the panels because if they're just kind of like smushed together it's hard to see that really thin black line. So it just…it makes it easier for you to be like oh this is a panel this is a panel this is a panel. Like you can tell that each panel is separate from one another."

I then posed the following question, "What happens in the gutters?" Mallory answered, "Umm…not a whole lot, but sometimes they like they're slanted to show action and sometimes there's like with that…ahh…with the doctor popping out and being in them. I think they just…they're not…generally speaking not much happens, but occasionally they are used as a tool to show certain elements of the story."

I asked Mallory to look at page 115 (See Image 15) and to talk through what is happening, panel by panel, as Navin and the slug-like warrior sneak into the robot house via the garbage chute. Mallory provided a detailed description of what is happening in each of the panels. I asked

her if she could identify where or when the slug-like warrior is climbing up the chute. She did not indicate that this is happening in the gutters, but rather made an interesting point that the slug character is only shown when he is with Navin, who is a main character.

Image 15:

I pushed Mallory further on where the action might be occurring within the format of the graphic novel. I questioned, "Could we say that that action, the climbing, happens in the gutters?" Mallory replied, "You could, yeah." I asked her what she thought of that idea. She said, "It's kind of interesting. That that's like the buffer of the act—like…that it's like the connection…like

the transition of the action as well as the…the…(sigh)…sort of the change or the transition from scene to scene."

Mallory and I then flipped to pages 118 and 119 (See Image 16) to continue the discussion and exploration of panels.

A: How do you know what is happening in the gutters?

M: Umm…you can sort of infer it, I guess. Because they're in one place and then they're in another so they must have somehow moved to get there.

A: And as you're reading, do you feel like you are making those inferences?

M: I think that they are sort of instant, like instantaneous. As soon as you know what happens in the next you like…umm…it's just sort of like, clearly they must've moved…so…

A: Is there something about the way graphic novels are laid out that allows it to be kind of instantaneous?

M: Umm…maybe the way that one panel just leads into another. I'm not really sure. That's a good question. I don't know.

A: Can you compare the use of gutters or what happens in gutters to anything else?

M: Well, sometimes, like in a TV show it will fade to black and then something else like you'll when you come back it's not exactly the same. So you just have to kind of infer what's happened in that black or like during that commercial or something.

Summary. Mallory struggled to describe, in words, exactly what happens in gutters. However, she indicated her understanding of the concept through what I would consider a format-to-format connection. She compared what happens in gutters to fade-outs in television shows. This comparison revealed that Mallory understood the workings of gutters. Although she was not sure how the layout of graphic novels leads the reader to instantaneously fill in the gutters, she did reference the idea of context by suggesting that what happens in one panel "leads into another."

Image 16:

SZAK!
SZT! SZT!
SZRAK!
WELCOME BACK, COGSLEY.
NOW HELP ME GET US OUT OF HERE.
THANKS, CHIEF.
BOOT SEQUENCE INITIATED.
WE SHOULD BE UP AND RUNNING IN THIRTY MINUTES.
COGSLEY, DO YOU BELIEVE IN PREMONITIONS?
THAT'S A STRANGE QUESTION TO ASK A ROBOT,
BUT I DO BELIEVE IN PREDICTIONS BASED ON SOUND MATHEMATICAL ASSUMPTIONS.
IF THE "PREMONITIONS" WERE BASED ON SUCH MATH, I WOULD BELIEVE THEM.
THEN LET'S HOPE TREES ARE BAD AT MATH.
DSHT!

Summary

Mallory was a well-read 8th grader, who is thoughtful about her reading and her thinking about reading. She was a strategic reader, as evidenced through her utilization of a number of reading strategies in her think-aloud. She appeared to view the graphic novel as something she could interact with, as she often questioned the text and even talked back to it. It is likely that these are strategies Mallory uses when reading texts in other formats, as she seemed practiced and comfortable with their use. She often employed the strategy of applying story knowledge developed over her years as an avid reader. She was familiar with many of the tropes presented in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, such as the strained father-son relationship that exhibited between the elf king and the elf prince.

Mallory's previous experience with graphic novels was limited to her reading of the *Bone* series. She applied some of what she learned by reading this series to the reading of the graphic novel in this study. Mallory preferred reading in a traditional format because she enjoys building the mental images that are described by the words in a text. She considered graphic novels to be easy, or "less than" books in a traditional format. Mallory does not believe that graphic novels are suited for a literature course because the limited amount of written text would not lend itself to a study of story, but she is potentially open to the idea of including graphic novels in other types of courses.

Mallory was aware of and able to name most of the parts of a graphic novel. In addition, she was cognizant of the role that most of the parts of the graphic novel played. She initially labeled the gutters as dividers and had not considered the closure necessitated by the gutters, but, when this was pointed out to her, she was open to the idea and eager to apply it to her overall understanding of graphic novels.

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PIM Pedagogy: Toward a Loosely Unified Model for Teaching and Studying Comics and Graphic Novels

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PIM Pedagogy: Toward a Loosely Unified Model for Teaching and Studying Comics and Graphic Novels

Regarding the study of comics and graphic novels in secondary- and higher education settings, while some resistance to coupling the schema of "comics" with "education" may persist, stakeholders have made enough progress such that the medium is recognized – albeit sometimes ignored – as an important element across a range of fields and courses in secondary- and post-secondary education. Herein, I offer standards and techniques for constructing comics-centric classes and teaching comics. While others focus on teaching comics based in tenets of design, popular culture, linguistics, critical theory and sundry other lenses, I present foundational knowledge based first in important precepts of education studies and theory.

I address how knowledge and integration of key concepts from education studies facilitates organizing comics courses and helps instructors teach them. Teachers and students alike may find this essay helps them read, study, and communicate understandings about comics texts. Among key, established pedagogical constructs examined are backward design, Bloom's taxonomy, the Marzano/Kendell scale, scaffolding, constructivism, and gradual release. Also, I introduce "PIM pedagogy," a set of strategies which facilitate instructors' and students' transmediated understanding of the comics form via page/panel analysis, imagetext, and multimodality.

Important to note is while it seems an increasing number of teachers and professors are teaching comics and seeking to expose the "new" format to "new" audiences, our contemporaneity represents the latest wave of educators, publishers, and scholars seeking to tap into comics' pedagogical potentials. Tilley points to Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, M.C. Gaines, and Josette Frank as among those connected to the comics industry in the 1940s who attempted to tie the medium to literacy and education. Tilley informs that National Comics' "perseverance in guiding young people's reading through book lists and other reading promotion features moved comic books, at least for a portion of their early history, from a format solely intended for amusement and recreation to one that promoted young people's literary and cultural development" ("Super" 253) and details a "Superman Good Reading Project" in which that hero would recommend novels to kids.

As well, Tilley illuminates efforts to integrate comics into the English Language Arts curriculum, or to help teachers see comics as important to students' development, at least, stemming from the mid-1930s. "Two documents [commissioned through the National Council of Teachers of English] — *An Experience Curriculum in English* ([W.W.] Hatfield, 1935) and *The English Language Arts* (Smith, 1952)—helped to establish the vision for [a] comprehensive and unifying [English Language Arts] curriculum," she informs ("Using Comics" 13). "In Hatfield's *Experience Curriculum* (1935), comics are treated in the recommended activities for literature instruction in the primary grades," Tilley asserts (14), and "The place of comics in Smith's *The English Language Arts* (1952) is somewhat more prominent" (14). Those interested in filling in gaps between the early history of comics and education and today should see more of Tilley as well as my entry on "Comics" in the *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, but suffice it to say comics' numerous pedagogical applications have been on the minds of stakeholders for decades, essentially since the birth of the American comic book.

The preceding paragraphs remind that comics-and-education connection-making isn't new, per se, but, undeniably, a renaissance and proliferation of attention to comics in education exists. Now, on

to the task of explicating specific principles from education studies which can assist those seeking to maximize settings in which comics are taught, with the ultimate goal of leading to a proposed loosely unified model for teaching and reading comics by this essay's conclusion.

Backward design is among the most important constructs to consider when crafting any curriculum, but given the variance of approaches and agendas inherent in teaching comics – so numerous some contend there can be no such construct as "comic studies" as a discipline (See C. Hatfield's "Indiscipline, or the Condition of Comics Studies") – employing backward design can help an educator focus a course. Popularized among teacher educators by Wiggins and McTighe in *Understanding by Design* and a bit of a revolution across teaching fields and levels, backward design is a three-pronged approach to developing curriculum:

1. Identify desired results.

2. Determine assessment evidence.

3. Plan learning experiences and instruction.

Essentially, one plans the course by starting where one wants to end, or wants the students to end, thinking about what learning outcomes and measures and activities in which one desires students to engage, show proficiency, or produce by the course's completion. Articulating goals and objectives throughout the backward design process (along with publishing the final articulation on the syllabus and discussing them in class early on), especially between steps 1 and 2, helps tighten curricula for comics courses for which it can be notoriously difficult to plan given myriad texts, scopes and sequences.

To that end, I use (and teach my pre-service teachers to use) specific language when stating my goals or objectives. I should note some in education see goals as broad articulations and objectives as specifics toward meeting the goal. Others may claim goals are for students while objectives are for teachers who must also consider standards – be they Common Core State Standards or better ones -- in their instruction, or vice versa, but I tend to see the words as synonymous for "what we'll accomplish in this course." I construct my goals via the formula "Students will _X_ via/by/through _Y_" wherein X is an action and Y is the means or product that will meet that action, showing evidence the X was accomplished.

Clearly, goals for a survey course will differ from those focusing on a specific author or genre, and goals for a comics design course may differ significantly from those for a literature course. So, it is incumbent upon those teaching comics courses to accept backward design in construction, publication, and discussion of comics courses and syllabi.

A goal for an introductory graphic novels course might look like this:

> "Students will formulate a working definition of the graphic novel by integrating scholarly readings, class discussions, and literature into a fully developed essay addressing a prompt asking them to do so."

whereas a goal from a more specialized course utilizing comics but not solely about them, such my graduate-level "Literature for Youth" course, a course rich in what Hatfield, through his understanding of Lattuca, might deem synthetic interdisciplinary because it "consists of research and teaching

prompted by questions that 'link' disciplines" (n.p.), namely graphic novels, Young Adult Literature, concepts of schooling and English Language Arts pedagogy, is stated as such:

> "Students will mine the intersections of adolescence, secondary education, and literary analysis through the intense study of and reflection on works of both scholarly and literary merit, specifically graphic novels in the domains of the humanities and the social sciences."

For more help crafting goals and standards in comics courses, the use of taxonomies can prove beneficial.

Bloom's Taxonomy is a standard by which many K12 teachers address goals and objectives, as is a newer scale created by Marzano and Kendell, which many see as a replacement to Bloom's but which I prefer to see as a supplement. Bloom's and Marzano and Kendell's work has a place in the comics course. Particularly, these scales help teachers determine a wide range of objectives to be met which also should help students at varying degrees of competency have some amount of success in the course. I see backward design, goal/objective creating, and the Bloom's as intricately tied to Vygotsky- and Bruner- informed constructivist notions of learning such as scaffolding and the zone of proximal development. Bruner states that scaffolding "refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring' (19). Teachers scaffold -- via discussion, questions, activities and formative data gathering -- to help each student expand their zone of proximal development, an abstract but measurable space between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. Via scaffolding, an instructor may reduce possible freedom on the onset, but over time and as student competency grows, one gradually releases more independence back to students. Indeed, this process is called "gradual release."

Taxonomies like the Bloom and Marzano/Kendell should key in professors to the fact that students do not all come to them prepackaged for high-level analysis of comics. Some are veteran readers; others may claim to have never read a comic. As with other types of texts, readers of comics may be at levels where they can understand, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize or critique them. They may or may not be able to do all of those things or do some of them as well as they can do others. Some may struggle to remember basic formalist facts whereas others are able to create immediately. So, what do teachers need to do when it comes to scaffolding comics reading in their classes?

There may be those who think teachers needn't offer any background priming on the comics form when they first ask students to read them. I like this idea of an immersion technique because it is in keeping with constructivist ideals of building knowledge through community work and discourse. The students and teacher can draw on the experiences and expertise of peers and the organic nature of exploratory hypothesis-building through this approach. While it may feel as if a professor loses some control via this means of introducing comics, the inchoate "messy work" may yield information the professor might have taken an entire semester learning about his students' intellect, creativity, etc. otherwise. Further, the student-centered activity may help students invest personally in the course, as the course began investing in them. This constructivist prior knowledge accessing and building could be prompted by such general questions such as "What makes comics comics?" and "How do we read a graphic novel, and what elements or aspects of the medium should we attend to for a fluent reading?"

Others may feel not providing some more-formal scaffolding may be irresponsible, especially if the class contains many first-time comics readers. Connors, for example, suggests a focus on "shapes, perspective, and left-right visual structures" ("Toward a Shared" 73). Indeed, knowing the associated vocabulary of comics – page, panels, gutters, emanata, balloons, etc. – is important if one is going to ask students to analyze and create, and the taxonomies we use to help craft instruction seem to support that claim. Bloom's suggests one must understand the vocabulary of comics before one can critique the form. Rigidity is a problem with taxonomies, of course, so they should be seen as aids rather than cures. But, examining the form's component parts may help students who are familiar with comics to share their knowledge and take on the role of experts, breaking down traditionalist classroom dynamics. So, one needn't worry about an approach which is either/or. Either approach implies that starting with formal elements of comics' structure, or language, is of import.

Versaci talks about using panel analysis as a means to get students to move beyond basic understanding of comics and into deep reading. Panel analysis may represent another early-in-the-course scaffold which can bridge the constructivist concepts explored herein. Using a nine-panel grid from Hernandez's "Flies on the Ceiling," Versaci helps students see that comics reading needn't always be linear, helping them to know to seek multiple entry points into a story just in case the left-to-right, top-to-bottom formula popular in many comics doesn't hold up – or in case the action leads to a revisioning of the story. I find focusing on a single panel can help students prepare for the intellectual stamina required in reading comics. For example, I'll often lead a first or second class with a single panel from *Maus*:

MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY MY FATHER'S OLD HOUSE. THE JANITOR HAS KNOWN OUR FAMILY FOR YEARS.
LET'S TRY. WE'VE GOT TO GET OFF THE STREETS BEFORE DAWN!
I WAS A LITTLE SAFE. I HAD A COAT AND BOOTS, SO LIKE A GESTAPO WORE WHEN HE WAS NOT IN SERVICE. BUT ANJA-HER APPEARANCE-YOU COULD SEE MORE EASY SHE WAS JEWISH. I WAS AFRAID FOR HER.

Figure 1: Page 136 of *Maus* affords a panel rich with text complexity, a strong scaffold for readers, some who may not know to look for such depth from comics.

I ask students to brainstorm on what this panel represents narratively, historically and stylistically. If no one knows the setting and basic plot of *Maus*, I'll frontload (scaffold) that information. Though, I prefer to let a knowledgeable student leader offer that information. Eventually we note the signifiers of spoken language via balloons and narration and past tense via the bottom text. We note even in one panel, comics offer a simultaneity we may observe again. Keen students note the masks, and those who have read the book before are able to explain that the masks mark the Jewish mice as passing as Polish non-Jews. With some prompting, I am able to get students to see the masks as visual representations of speech. Vladek and Anja are speaking Polish, but Vladek's linguistic mastery is greater than his wife's, and this fact is signified via the abstraction of mask-wearing (an abstraction overlaying the abstraction of real people as mice). Recognizing Anja's tail as a sign of her less-proficient passing is often a light-bulb moment and helps students see how print and image can co-scaffold, or transmediate (see Siegel). Yes, part of appropriate scaffolding of comics reading/teaching is helping students see comics as a self-scaffolding medium, one which offers comprehension assistance to those who read deeply enough to see the assistance offered and accept comics as a clever, playful, deliberate art and literature.

Panel analysis, either through a single image or a full page of panels (page analysis), ties to notions of multimodality that I feel are essential for teaching comics effectively. Rooted in the work of Cope and Kalantzis and the New London Group, a multimodal lens helps readers to examine texts through a series of interconnected modes, or designs, and asks readers to consider what "affordances" a medium offers – what it can and can't do or allows us to do. Indeed, the work Versaci does with his students via Hernadez's "Flies on the Ceiling" and I've done with *Maus* are basically activities in noting comics' affordances. New London Group scholars identify five modes, or designs, worthy of attention: the audio, spatial (including ecosystems and architecture, important distinctions if we are to give attention to comics formal elements), gestural, visual and linguistic. Clearly Versaci and I ask students to attend to these modes in panel analysis to frontload/scaffold teaching comics. Adding the language of modes of design to panel analysis can create and boost students' metacognitive awareness of what they are studying, giving them added terminology and frames to help them note their own critical thought processes.

Thankfully, scholars and educators are catching on to the power of the multimodal lens for examining comics. Dale Jacobs' work is exceptionally important in this regard. Wolfe and Kleijwegt write about how the multimodal lens helps them teach comics versions of Shakespeare. Katie Monnin pulls from New London Group writer Gunther Kress as the basis for much of her comics-and-literacy work. Leber-Cook and Cook suggest the multimodal lens deepened their appreciation of comics as teachers and scholars and afforded their adult ESL students learning opportunities. Connors finds fluent comics readers pull from available designs or modes inherently, suggesting educators might do well to embrace multimodal analysis in formal instruction and in informal reading (I reiterate the value I see in making the inherent and informal formal and coherent via direct instruction, observation, and application of modes of design, of strengthening rigor of analysis via making the cognitive but perhaps unstated metacognitive and stipulated). I suggest, as does Jacobs, that building students' skills in multimodal analysis pairs well with work from McCloud, whose *Understanding Comics* and *Making Comics* are

pivotal in many comics courses but should be braided with others work. (As Horrocks suggests, McCloud's definition of comics and system of studying them needn't be the official definition. Others exist). While McCloud's suggestion for analysis are well-established in comics studies, I suggest braiding New London Group-informed multimodal analysis with McCloud's six types of panel progressions and rudimentary imagetext theory to fully frontload/scaffold comics courses. McCloud suggests comics advance via either moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, non-sequitur progressions between and among panels. Rudimentary elements from Mitchell's imagetext theory can offer a bridge between and across panel/page analysis and McCloudian/multimodal analysis. Mitchell illuminates two basic image-text distinctions: imagetext, in which pictorial and alphabetic language work in consonance an form composite, logical co-scaffolds, and image/text, in which the imagistic and the alphabetic seem to cleave from one another, working in dissonance to suggest rupture or discord. Together, panel and page analysis (P), imagetext, (I) and multimodal notions of image study constitute what I refer to as "PIM pedagogy."

I have asked audiences of both practicing teachers (who hadn't read the texts) and pre-service teachers (who had) to apply these the lenses simultaneously to the images below from Brosgol's *Anya's Ghost*. I provided plot for the teachers, given their cold reading of the images. The pre-service teachers read the comic in one of my Young Adult Literature courses. Generally, both audiences suggested engaging in this tri-partite strategy helped them know how to read a comic deeply, revealed new insights into the text or prompted prediction-making/investment in the comics, and deepened their appreciation for the rigor inherent in comics-reading and comics-making (again, with plot information frontloaded as needed). For example, in the below promotional material for *Anya's Ghost*, Anya is seen smoking and ensconced in the spectral cloud of Emily. Some noted the gestural and spatial dynamics suggested a dissonant relationship. Anya seems irked while Emily seems happy; Emily's arms seem to grab for Anya; Anya is encircled, possibly as if trapped. Is the smoke of Emily bad for Anya, as is the smoke of the tobacco? The imagetext dynamics suggest a narrative with multiple perspectives and possibilities, where what is beneficial to one party may not always beneficial to the other.

Figure 2: This promotional art for *Anya's Ghost, available at* http://apeonthemoon.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/ft7.jpg, affords attention via the imagetext lens.

The imagetext in the following pages is more consonant in that the text and image offer less ambiguity, and the multiple panels afford readers the ability to note how Brosgol uses formal elements of comics construction, how she utilizes various modes, how the panels progress, and how all those things work together to form meaning. Note the overlapping panels in page thirteen and how the spatial/architectural mode blends with the gestural. Jagged lines reveal Anya's emotional turmoil and inattention to her surroundings. The modes combine poignantly when Anya calls for help meagerly, the length of the panel, the shape of the balloon, and the weakening of her voice contributing to her growing hopelessness of getting out of the well into which she has distractedly fallen.

Figure 3: Pages 12, 13, and 17 from *Anya's Ghost* replete with affordances for applying PIM pedagogy.

Adequate attention to course goals and outcomes and to comics' structure are essential to building students' appreciation and understanding of the form. Introducing well-engrained, widely applicable terminology about form, function and fluidity in early classes or experiences with comics facilitates students' learning. Guided or communal panel analysis, when panels are chosen carefully, offers opportunities for illustrating the potential complexity inherent in comics' central frame, as can page analysis.

While some may point to abstract comics as potential scuttles to this work (See Molotiu; Beaty), I assert abstract comics' potency comes largely from an essential challenge to engrained notions of comics narrative normativity, so these approaches remain strong places from which to start, as challenging assumptions from earlier in a course should be part of work later in a course. Initially, panel and page analysis may focus on keying students in on the level of work it takes to read comics well but may or may not include direct interaction with formalist critical approaches. However, braiding basics

from McCloud's panel progression theory, Mitchell's imagetext, and multimodal theory may strengthen discourse and analysis initially and throughout a course, as they offer students structural, formal, and theoretical vocabulary. These "PIM" (panel/page analysis + imagetext + McCloud/multimodal) strategies have focused on planning and starting a comics course. Below I offer a model for evolving through classes once heavy reading begins.

Milner & Milner, authors of the ubiquitous *Bridging English* textbook, which synthesizes much of English Language Arts eupraxis, suggest four stages of reading literature. Each stage builds on the work of the preceding stage and prepares the next. The 4-step model is neither "linear nor circular" (104) but recursive as needed. This model may offer a bridge between reading comics and reading other types of literature while also offering a means of addressing the unique qualities of comics to which readers can attend and which may have been introduced via the suggested frontloading strategies.

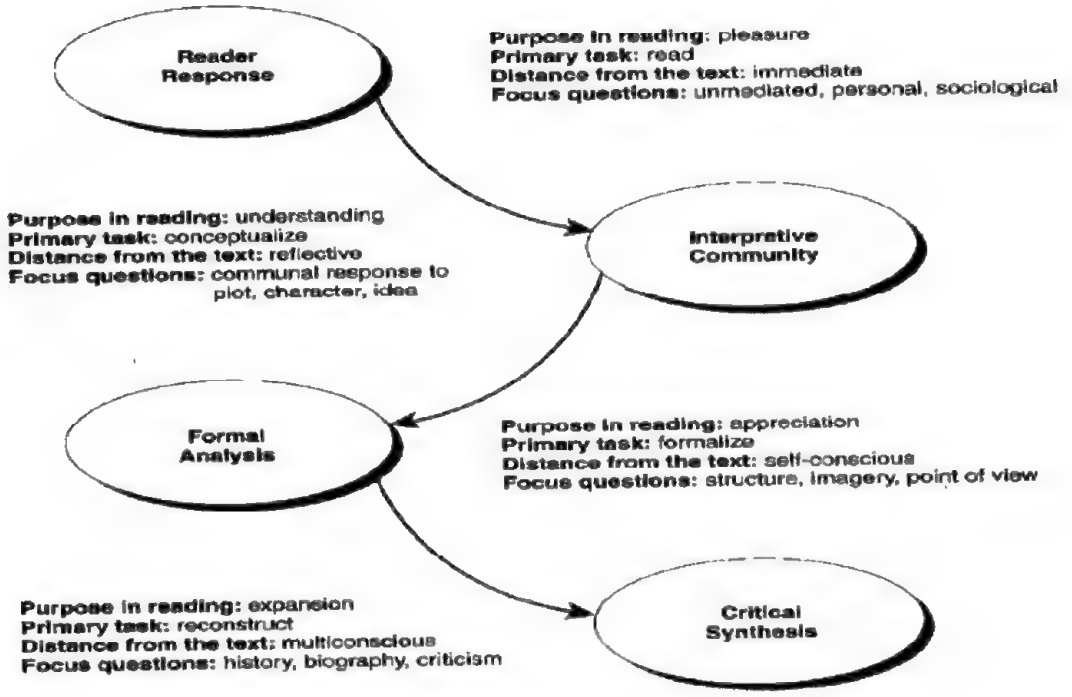
Reader Response
Purpose in reading: pleasure
Primary task: read
Distance from the text: immediate
Focus questions: unmediated, personal, sociological
Purpose in reading: understanding
Primary task: conceptualize
Distance from the text: reflective
Focus questions: communal response to plot, character, idea
Interpretive Community
Formal Analysis
Purpose in reading: appreciation
Primary task: formalize
Distance from the text: self-conscious
Focus questions: structure, imagery, point of view
Purpose in reading: expansion
Primary task: reconstruct
Distance from the text: multiconscious
Focus questions: history, biography, criticism
Critical Synthesis

Figure 4: Milner and Milner's four stages of reading literature, from page 104 of their *Bridging English*.

The first two modes, Reader Response and Interpretive Community, attend to basic understanding, text-to-self relationships, and general comprehension. Work in the Interpretive Community and Formal Analysis modes transitions from basic comprehension to applying text-to-text formal analysis. Formal analysis and Critical Synthesis integrate text-to-text and text-to-world notions of analysis and critique and creation. Bloom's in bloom, so to speak. A progression through these modes – through guided questioning, written responses, Socratic discussion, or group activities – may properly scaffold a reading of any graphic novel. Further, students can build and hone their budding knowledge of comics

formalism/structuralism throughout the model. Versaci's panel analysis seems an appropriate activity, either in frontloading (scaffolding) before the sequence or in this part of the loose sequence, as does page analysis. One can argue the braiding of panel progression, imagetext and multimodal (PIM) theories already moves students into formal analysis and critical synthesis. As well, just as critical theory often builds historically from formalist to post-structuralist, applying this four-pronged loose progression affords professors opportunities to integrate new critical concepts with students who have a foundation. Again, it should be noted strategies based in this development needn't be stringent. Individuals and specific classes will find their way to these stages with adequate leadership. However, as one plans daily readings and goals per meeting, this model may facilitate both a whole course evolution and learning per session.

In summary, so far I have articulated means through which to create, begin, and evolve a course on comics and graphic novels. These means are rooted in experience in my fields of literature and education, particularly English Language Arts Pedagogy, and I hope to have addressed a concern that many other advisory texts regarding the teaching of comics are somewhat paradoxically rooted in the medium and various critical and artistic fields but not in pedagogical theory itself. Two goals remain: Considering the later part of courses and braiding together the principles and constructs explored thus far. First, a rather obvious but easily ignored component from which I feel every comics course and every student in it can benefit.

Bitz's longitudinal research finds students engaged in comics-making develop skills, strengths and understandings even their traditional academic preparation may not have developed or revealed. Having experience teaching comics to a range of students spanning from middle school to graduate school, I find tasking students with creating comics essential to their understanding of the complexity of the form, and I have asked even graduate students to do this after an exploration of the form and multiple examples. In action research in which I examined journal entries from undergraduate students in which they reflected on their growing understandings and appreciations of comics as thoughtful craft and a labor- and intellectually- intensive narrative medium, I found asking students to create their own comics was an activity which helped them respect the form and challenge lingering preconceived notions of worth and rigor. Stated simply, comics making is hard work ("What The").

Given the second-class status afforded the image in literary studies, asking students to make their own comics in those courses may be even more imperative. Professors could ask students to produce small comics to illustrate mastery of certain concepts, like those from PIM, throughout the course. To note their understanding of new critical elements of comics or the critical theories they present (Lacanian notions of othering, for example, in X-Men comics or Freudian concepts at play in Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*) as students move through Formal Analysis and Critical Synthesis stages, students might create their own short narratives. Or, some type of comics-making could factor into end-of-the-course summative assignments. While that option may require a professor to check in periodically with students to note their plans and progress, leaving room for a major comics product toward the end of a course allows adequate time for the labor-intensive comics production process and allows students to pull from as much structural and critical knowledge of the form gleaned from the semester as possible and may allow for a purer gradual release approach. I reiterate that I see comics-making as an essential part to any and every comics course. I abide by the principle that creation is the utmost iteration of understanding and critique.

Indeed, in the revised Bloom's, creation is the last prong of the hierarchy, coming after evaluating. In the Marzano/Kendell scale, creation has a place in the "own it" domain if not in preceding domains. On both scales, creation is seen as a higher-order thinking skill. A key goal of multimodal pedagogy is facilitating students' design knowledge. Meaning making – and evidence thereof, for professors seeking to illustrate how learning objectives were met—comes from noting available designs and their affordances; engaging in the work of designing/creating; and examining and articulating the affordances of the redesigned. Through design work/creating, students illustrate understandings of current trends, issues, and thought ("situated practice," as per the parlance), critically engage with those conditions, and demonstrate "transformed practice" through a product which illustrates their understanding while offering something new to facilitate the understandings of others. For some multimodal scholars – especially those concerned with representations and power dynamics in popular media – creation/recreation, designing through redesigning, newly situating practice via transforming practice, the most power form of creation and communication is parody. To return to the potential for abstract comics to "go rogue " in these regards, we may see the work of abstract comics makers as seeking to move us into transformed practice and to make us aware of redesigns within comics narratology. Abstract comics parody sourced norms via elucidating tremendous understanding and critique of them. Either through parody or designing (or, to reconcile the constructs, via seeing all designing within a form as parody regardless of connotative utterances of the word), students can illustrate formal and critical proficiency as well as earn an appreciation for the craft via the making process. Some comics-creation assignments should be part of any comics course and offer means to elucidate the complexity and dexterity inherent in thinking about and producing comics. What's more, pedagogically speaking, creating is seen as paramount evidence of actual learning in various models of teaching and across educational theories.

Of course, I argue the tenets and suggestions shared herein are themselves braided. I see them as braided through constructivism. While no course or person can represent a pure constructivism – nor should they -- there are times when the most-learned member of a community (often the teacher) must lead, model, and even lecture. When lecture is situated as scaffold toward communal and individual learning, even it is a technique which fits within a constructivist model. Backward design accounting for Bloom's and Marzano/Kendell in course construction and delivery; utilizing frontloading via PIM and letting PIM be a springboard to other critical theories; progressing through the Milner & Milner model when needed; and integrating opportunities for designing and redesigning as evidence of transformed practice can blend to offer a needed but necessarily loose model of teaching comics rooted in pedagogical theory and practice.

Below is visual articulation of the model, a loose hierarchy or taxonomy, if you will, of comics study. I present it with caveats that taxonomies are similar to all systems in that none are perfect and often, once created, they seem to exist more to serve themselves than to be applied with necessary intellectual and utilitarian acumen. I admit frontloading/modeling a panel analysis before getting to any of these "stages" may help address all of them. I see the model only as progressive as it needs to be given specific students and sets of students. Certainly the model should be seen as recursive and reflexive and should allow for comics creation in its highest levels of proficiency, if not throughout.

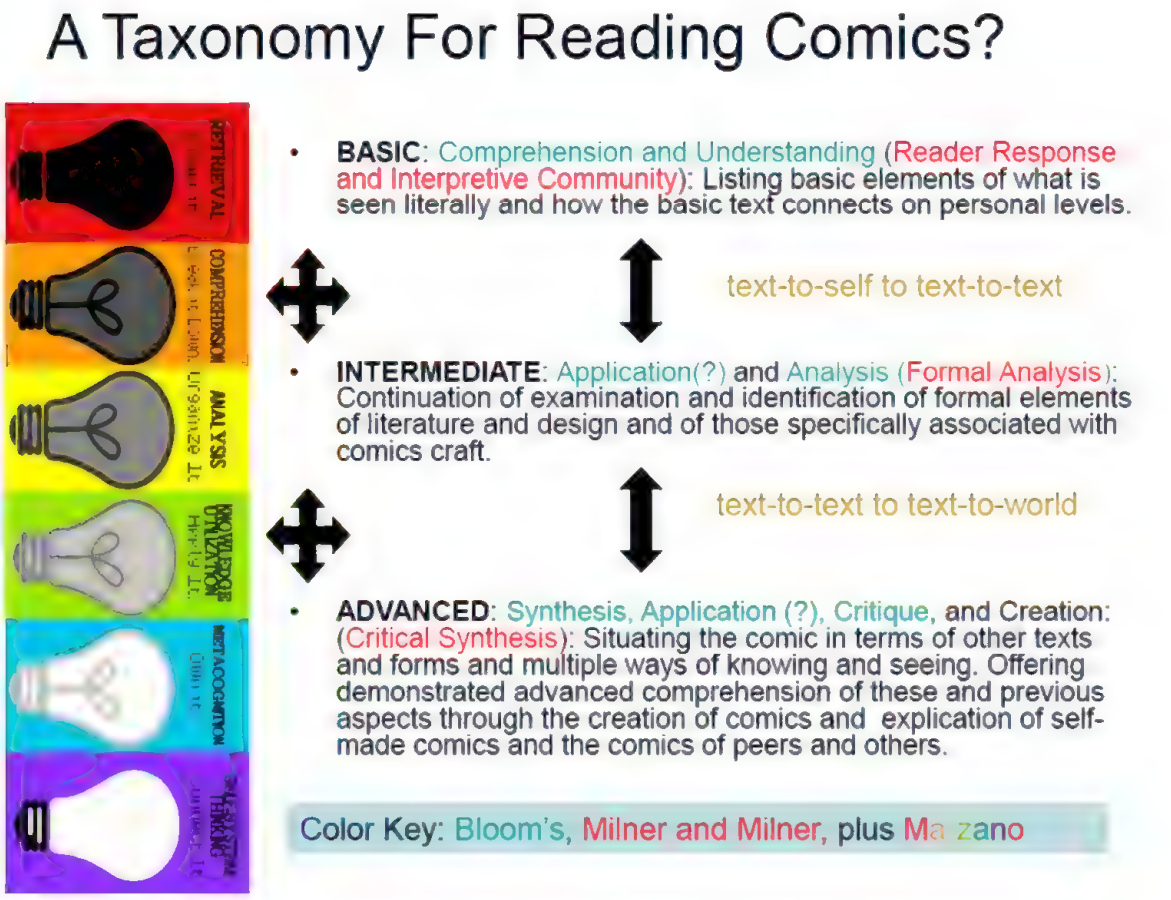
A Taxonomy For Reading Comics?
RETRIEVAL
COMPREHENSION
ANALYSIS
KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION
METACOGNITION
SELF-SYSTEM THINKING
• BASIC: Comprehension and Understanding (Reader Response and Interpretive Community): Listing basic elements of what is seen literally and how the basic text connects on personal levels.
text-to-self to text-to-text
• INTERMEDIATE: Application(?) and Analysis (Formal Analysis): Continuation of examination and identification of formal elements of literature and design and of those specifically associated with comics craft.
text-to-text to text-to-world
• ADVANCED: Synthesis, Application (?), Critique, and Creation: (Critical Synthesis): Situating the comic in terms of other texts and forms and multiple ways of knowing and seeing. Offering demonstrated advanced comprehension of these and previous aspects through the creation of comics and explication of self-made comics and the comics of peers and others.
Color Key: Bloom's, Milner and Milner, plus Ma zano

Figure 5: A taxonomy for teaching, reading, and studying comics. PIM processes may take place across the hierarchy but may need particular attention as students move from lower-order processes such as identification to higher-order processes such as critique and creation. Note "application" is placed in question. Application has been viewed as a lower-order skill, but I see it as higher-order, as always connected to the highest-order skills of analysis, critique, and creation. The Marzano scale is illustrated via the lightbulbs graphic ubiquitous online and often accompanied by the overarching tag of "Learning is much more than knowing," as can be seen here: http://koprowski.weebly.com/learning-tools.html. From top to bottom, skills grow in complexity, from retrieval of learned information to owning (via creating?) and connection-making. In this manner, the Marzano/Kendell influence gels with Bloom, Milner & Milner, and PIM principles.

The taxonomy is offered to facilitate instruction rather than as something to be taught to students. While the model allows for students' gaining metacognitive awareness of how they study and create comics, a metacognition of the taxonomy itself may not need exploring. Then again, if the model is to be improved upon – redesigned -- and stay true to my constructivist underpinnings which informed its creation, informing students of it as a model of building and informing their metacognition regarding comics seems perfectly desirable.

Regardless, it should be clear I feel to read and study comics fully and deeply, students need scaffolds. Via teaching formal elements and vocabulary of comics and design and "PIM pedagogy" to get them started, offering myriad opportunities to explore the form – *as* a form *and* connected to other texts in meaningful ways (such as through critical lenses, guided big questions, history, or thematic foci) – and presenting opportunities to consider, critique and create informed by multiple theories or lenses (thereby extending the value of PIM), educators can offer students pedagogically-informed comics

courses in any discipline and with any focus. In its rudimentary state, this model of teaching, reading and studying comics takes into account key concepts from education studies – perhaps making it unique among scholarly texts on understanding and teaching comics and filling a significant gap in the literature. May it inform and benefit teachers; may teachers and scholars offer iterations and improvements and compare it to other visual/textual/linguistic and transmediating systems (others of utility among those already cited might include Cohn; Siegel ; and Sipe & Panteleo). Finally, and most importantly, may the model facilitate accomplishment of the goal Wolfe and Kleijwegt mention in their study of comics adaptations of Shakespeare: May the taxonomy move students from passive receivers of multimodal texts like comics to active perceivers (30).

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Revision in the Multiversity: What Composition Can Learn from the Superhero

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We live in an era in which revision has emerged as a central strategy of contemporary superhero narratives. As I write these words, both of the major corporate overseers of superhero comics are in the midst of two more continuity-altering "events", *Convergence* and *Secret Wars*, in what has become a formulaic mode of composition by which the intertextual secondary worlds of Marvel and DC attempt to sustain themselves and their readers' attention. This ubiquity of revision is unique neither to the superhero nor to this historical moment; indeed, the generation of different versions of characters and their narrative cosmos is characteristic of several enduring fictional worlds, from those of Orestes and Odysseus to Sherlock Holmes and James Bond. Nevertheless, the distinctive convergence of economic and aesthetic conditions that has characterized the production and consumption of superhero texts for much of their history has contributed to a compositional environment in which constant and ongoing revision is one of the genre's most characteristic qualities: "Whether the superhero finds its roots in ancient mythologies or takes shape as the quintessential commodity of the 21st century's world marketplace, it must be acknowledged that as long as the superhero has been in existence, it has been 'in the making,' working through a series of revisions" (Wandtke 5).

The omnipresence of revision throughout the history of the superhero genre has perhaps obfuscated deeper inquiries into the precise nature of the different practices and processes that the term can be used to describe, and the ways in which these practices have shifted and developed over time. Of particular importance is the increasing tendency of several distinct revised continuities to co-exist, so much so that Henry Jenkins posits this trend as the defining characteristic of the most recent organizational system of narrative production within the superhero genre, a paradigm shift within contemporary superhero fiction from *continuity* to *multiplicity*:

> Today, comics have entered a period when principles of multiplicity are felt at least as powerfully as those of continuity. Under this new system, readers may consume multiple versions of the same franchise, each with different conceptions of the character, different understandings of their relationships with the secondary figures, different moral perspectives, exploring different moments in their lives, and so forth. (" 'Just Men in Tights' " 20-21)

While the paradigm of continuity involves a never-ending battle to render textual inconsistencies, alternatives, and recursions into a coherent whole, multiplicity is characterized by the coexistence of several divergent, and often contradictory, continuities: " Under this system, readers may consume multiple versions of the same franchise, each with different conceptions of the character, different understandings of their relationships with the secondary figures, different moral perspectives, exploring different moments in their lives, and so forth" (20).

Prior to the advent of the generic pattern that Jenkins signifies by the term *multiplicity*, the superhero genre's framing of the revision process had been guided by a deeply rooted belief that the purpose of revising is the elimination of textual discontinuities, resulting in a consistent and coherent final product. This predilection is shared by the underlying premises of revision in other scholarly disciplines, from textual editing's historical goal of delineating and ultimately disposing of corruptions and impurities, to composition studies' situating of revision as a culminating stage in the production of a final draft. This sense of revision as the practice of establishing and maintaining continuity is so basic that one is tempted to see it as a part of revision's pre-ontology: a *sine qua non* so fundamental as to be beyond question. However, several relatively recent superhero narratives have taken advantage of the narrative freedom from

established continuity by taking a different approach to revision, one that acknowledges the discontinuities of the superhero's textual past rather than seeking to abscond and erase them. This revaluation involves a transformation of the conception of revision in which it is viewed not as the practice of developing a singular definitive text, but rather as the articulation of the relationship between multiple textual versions.

This paper explores the parallels between this transformation and the struggles within contemporary composition studies to reestablish the relevance of textual practices in the wake of the sea changes within the discipline frequently characterized as the *social turn*. The nexus of this conversation is a mutual concern with the idea of *revision* as the practice of negotiating disruptions of continuity. Nancy Welch writes in 1997 that:

> …the actual word *revision*…doesn't appear as it did throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the research of Nancy Sommers, Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Richard Beach, Linda Flower and John Hayes, and other compositionists who sought to understand just how and when writers revise in their texts, what revision does, and how it can be encouraged in the classroom. (24)

While scholars such as Cheryl Ball are currently doing provocative research on revision of multimodal texts, the fact remains that the applications and implications of revision as composing strategy remain largely hidden from mainstream disciplinary attention. When the word is still utilized, revision is frequently used to signify shifts in consciousness regarding social and institutional dynamics, and the new and revised outlooks resulting from such shifts:

"...revision of our notions of argument and authority, genre and identity, revision of the usual narrative of academic socialization" (24).

Welch situates this transformation within the context of John Trimbur's articulation of larger disciplinary shifts in attitude towards theories and practices associated with the process movement:

> As composition takes "the social turn," Trimbur writes, teachers and researchers no longer locate their interests and questions in "students' reading and writing processes," but instead in "the cultural politics of literacy"(p.109). With this shift, revision, understood as a late stage in a generic writing process, gets left behind, outdated as words like *prewriting* and *planning*. Any mention of such words, I'm guessing, might signal what Trimbur calls "an unwillingness to break" with 1970s process pedagogies (p.112). Ironically, however, what seems to happen in the social turn is this: Even as post-process theorists charge process pedagogy with ignoring context, erasing social differences and social forces, their own research similarly effaces specific writers and scenes of writing. (24)

In this environment, textual activities such as revision drift outside of the main concerns of the discipline, or else become redefined in ways that establish meanings less dependent on the act of writing. Joseph Harris echoes Welch's observations regarding this state of affairs by noting that this view of revision "illustrates a shift in focus away from the practice of writing and toward questions about social values, subjectivities, ethics, and ideologies" (577).

Several superhero narratives composed in the aftermath of Jenkins' paradigm shift towards multiplicity reveal that constant and ongoing revision is the compositional tactic through

which new texts negotiate the powerful struggle between reiteration of the genre's past, and creative expression of its future. These narratives, by making explicit the superhero genre's negotiations with continuity and multiplicity, provide provocative conceptual frameworks for new directions through which to reinvigorate study of the practice of revision within composition studies. Instead of a gradual succession of improved renditions of a text, each one effacing and superseding the imperfections of its predecessors, revision is revealed as the production of multiple versions whose differences and diversities are "capable of being in uncertainties", as Keats describes the creative attitude which he terms Negative Capability: ontologically equal textual variations that wear their inconsistencies openly, and reject the pressure to resolve their multiplicities into the synthetic continuity of a polished final text. In the following pages, two of these narratives will be explored as offering new frames and metaphors that can assist in re-imagining the practice of revision within the writing classroom: *Planetary*; and *Supreme: The Story of the Year.*

Planetary: Revision as Resistance

Warren Ellis' *Planetary* focuses on a mysterious eponymous organization that employs three super-powered operatives, Elijah Snow, Jakita Wagner, and The Drummer, to achieve its goals. These goals differ radically from the traditional motivations operative within the genre. In his introduction to the collected trade paperback, Alan Moore describes the premise of the series as follows:

> The heroes…are neither crime-fighters nor global guardians, but, by some perfect stroke of inspiration, archaeologists. People digging down beneath the surface of the world to learn its past, its secrets and its marvels. In this instance, though, the

> world that's under excavation is not our immediate sphere, despite the fact that it's almost as familiar. Instead, we dig into a planet that is nothing less than the accumulated landscape of almost a hundred years of fantasy, of comic books. (*All Over The World* ii)

The Planetary team's explorations of this landscape extend backwards into the 19th Century, as they uncover evidence of such proto-super types as Baron Frankenstein and his monster, Dracula, and Sherlock Holmes; pulp-fiction characters such as Doc Savage, the Shadow, and Tarzan; and the Golden-Age superhero triumvirate of Superman, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman. In addition, variant generic and medial fictions of the extraordinary are encountered by the Planetary team: a Japanese island inhabited by analogues of the Toho film studio's pantheon of *kaiju*; a Bond-inspired espionage agent; nuclear-triggered mutations inspired byHollywood science fiction films of the 1950s,. These narrative encounters with the superhero's generic predecessors and parallels culminate in the revelation of the Four, recognizable analogues of the Fantastic Four, as the main antagonists of Planetary. The Four are engaged in the active suppression of the very evidence of alternative textual traditions that the Planetary team seeks to uncover and preserve.

The diegetic transformation of the Fantastic Four into villains highlights the moral ambiguity present in muted form in the original Marvel characters' earliest versions. Story elements present in the early source texts, such as the ambivalence of the Thing towards using his powers for good and the narrative conflation of science, anticommunism, and justice, are reinterpreted in *Planetary*'s retelling as explicit manifestations of American hegemony and arrogance. Viewed as revision, therefore, the Four's new status as villains reflects a shift in the assessment of, rather than a radical alteration of, basic established elements of the characters'

facticity; in much the same way, Odysseus' polytropic cleverness undergoes a revaluation from heroic virtue to dangerous vice in the mythic revision practiced in Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedy. However, in *Planetary*, this narrative role is secondary to the Four's metatextual function as representation of the general impact of silver-age revision upon the superhero genre. The very success of the silver-age paradigms introduced by the Fantastic Four has had the collateral effect of obscuring versions of the superhero genre that seem to violate these narrative parameters. Through the filtering lens of this dominant generic touchstone, earlier versions of the superhero are viewed as either preparatory drafts that will eventually culminate in the attainment of the finished product, or else dismissed as irrelevant and forgettable. The Four thus represent the triumph of one narrative version over the multiplicity of ignored textual pasts and potential futures available within the superhero genre. William Leather, the "Human Torch" of *Planetary*'s Four, gives voice to this will to domination:

> Remember what we four are. We were reborn in the exploding heart of the multiverse. We are optimal humans. We are explorers, scientist gods, the secret heroes of a world that doesn't deserve us…..We were given the world in 1961. We know all the things that you've struggled to uncover for decades. We **are** all those things. We **are** the secret history of the planet— for we are its secret chiefs. (133)

Both the Four's attempts to suppress and control all manifestations of the extraordinary other than themselves, as well as Planetary's attempts to preserve and restore the marginalized genre forms of the past that have been lost and forgotten with the ascendancy of the Silver Age paradigm, can be seen as acts of revision. The Four practice revision as the dismissal of all alternatives to their own textual hegemony; the diegetic reasoning behind this is the Four's desire

to prevent the development of any potential threats to the Four's status as ultimate world power. However, it applies equally to the process by which a single text attempts to assert precedence over all other texts: to become the definitive source of the *fabula*. This is revision as the imposition of power over the already-written; following the advice of David Bartholomae, it begins by being dismissive:

> I begin by not granting the writer her "own" presence in that paper, by denying the paper's status as a record of or a route to her own thoughts and feelings. I begin instead by asking her to read her paper as a text already written by the culture, representing a certain predictable version of the family, the daughter, and the writer. I ask her to look at who speaks in the essay and who doesn't. I ask her to look at the organization of the essay to see what it excludes. And I ask her to revise in such a way that the order of the essay is broken-to write against the grain of the discourse that has determined her account of her family. (85)

However, Bartholomae insists that this dismissiveness is in the service of memory; it serves as a painful yet necessary counter to the misguided Utopian attempt to create a discursive space free from the past that he associates with Peter Elbow's writings and practices. In *Planetary*, this aggressive revision is seen as precisely the means by which the past is subjugated to the will of the present. The undesirable textual elements are viewed as antagonists; the Four's revisionary goal is to erase every trace of them. The destruction and chaos that follows in the wake of the Four's revision illustrates both the impossibility of such an erasure, as well as the damaging results of such an attempt.

Thus, memory, particularly as manifest by the reader's recollection of superseded textual versions, in *Planetary* is an act of resistance. The Four represent the drive towards primacy of

smooth narrative continuity. The cost, the loss of textual realities that accompanied the triumph of the Silver Age paradigm represented by The Four, is the price of privileging *fabula* over *syuzhet*: the triumph of story continuity over textual reality. For the recursive eradication of predecessors renders their ontological status "merely" textual; the "real" story is supertextual, or, at least, only capable of expression in an *ultimate* text.

Except for the fact that we remember them. No amount of recursive revision of the story can completely erase reader recollections of superseded textual realities. The hegemony of the Four, and of the narrative approach that they embody, is thus opposed by memory. That memory should be at the thematic crux of contemporary superhero fiction is not without irony, given the ephemeral presuppositions which until recently governed both the production and consumption of most superhero narratives. Ongoing serial publication has created a situation in which prior versions cannot be erased as easily as the draft materials of traditional texts. There is no delete button to push; no crumpled pages to toss in the waste basket. Writing over the past has not resulted in a palimpsest whose bottom layers need to be carefully restored with infrared equipment. The old text is as bright as the primary colors in which it was printed: if not in mylar-sealed collectibles or archival reprint volumes, then in the memories of those readers whose passionate responses are a main reason for the continued production of new versions of the superhero.

Planetary incorporates this tension at a later point in its storyline, when the reader discovers that the Four have placed memory blocks on Elijah Snow. The result is not total amnesia, but selective retention of the past, as Randall Dowling, leader of the Four explains to the captured Snow:

> So here are the rules. You submit to the placing of a sequence of blocks in your memory. Just enough to prevent you from being quite so useful. And go away. Go and hide (*Planetary Reader* 43).

The danger that Snow poses is that his memories are unfiltered by the recursive alterations of the most up-to-date texts. His recollections are the last remnants of the narrative trends that were either transformed by or left out of the Four's revised universe. The multiple and divergent narrative possibilities residing in the superhero genre's own narrative history, Elijah Snow's unblocked memories, challenge the domination of this tendency towards finality and consistency. Snow thus represents an alternative paradigm for dealing with revision when faced with discontinuity; rather than viewing irreconcilable texts as problems to be resolved, they are for him ineluctable realities that must be preserved.

In *Planetary*, this preservation takes an explicitly compositional form. The main tactic employed by Planetary in their struggle against the Four is not the generically ubiquitous violent showdown between heroes and villains, although *Planetary* has its share of action sequences. Instead, the victories of Planetary are achieved through the ongoing composition of a series of texts-within-the–*Planetary*-text known as the Planetary Guides, a kind of ethnographic memoir written and published annually by the centenarian Snow since the 1920s. Thus, archival preservation becomes a political act of resistance to the power of the present text to rewrite its own history.

The struggle between Planetary and the Four emphasizes the power of revision as a means of resisting hegemonic forms. The Four are driven to obscure or erase evidence of paradigms that preceded their status as dominant generic narrative, and to destroy or subjugate

new manifestations of the fantastic as they arise, precisely because they perceive these alternatives as threats to their position as the definers of generic parameters. To borrow Raymond Williams' famous categories of cultural transition, the Four represent the struggle of the dominant to incorporate those aspects of residual and emergent forms that remain somewhat independent, and thus capable of generating alternative or oppositional paradigms (Williams 121-127). This is because such traces are among the most potent sources for generating new texts that challenge the hegemony of normative standards. Seen in this light, Bartholomae's strategy of a revision that begins by being dismissive of the text is not an act of resistance to the complex forces that write through us; rather, the subjugation of the version to the devaluing critical gaze is presumptuous, and removes the text from the historical continuum within which it may prove to be the source of unpredictable alternative, or even oppositional, compositions. Instead, the Planetary team's practice of unearthing and archiving the hidden past and alternative present of the superhero genre emphasizes the revolutionary aspect of Donald Murray's idea of revision as *discovery*: "Revision— the process of seeing what you've said to discover what you have to say— is the motivating force within most writers. They are compelled to write to see what their words tell them" (56). The ability to see what has been said can only occur when the textual evidence remains available. In a world where the dismissal and marginalization of non-hegemonic views is the primary mode of domination, resistance is most successfully practiced through the uncritical preservation of alternatives.

The *Planetary* paradigm embraces the odd contradictions intrinsic to the genre's distinct narrative structure and history, to a tradition that has seen its implied reader transform from early adolescence to adulthood, and its historical context from the Manichean clarity of the Second World War to the ambivalence and ambiguity of millennial late capitalism. The official,

sanctioned continuity of the moment no longer serves as the Procrustean bed that cuts away unwanted textual history; rather, it becomes co-extensive with the texts that produce it. *Planetary* calls this new paradigm the *Snowflake*:

> The Snowflake rotates. Each element of the Snowflake rotates. Each rotation describes an entirely new universe. The total number of rotations are equal to the number of atoms making up the earth. Each rotation makes a new earth. This is the multiverse. (*All Over The World* 17)

This is the shape of the superhero narrative at this stage of its evolution. Its history is dense enough that it has become a tradition; its creators now work with an awareness of narrative paradoxes and their stories have become increasingly self-referential regarding the textual past of the genre. The choice currently before the medium is between the two approaches: linear continuity versus the Snowflake; the universe versus the multiverse; an updated version of the past versus a genuine exploration of influences both hidden and obvious; the Four versus Snow and the Planetary team. As another famous advocate of textual infinitude writes: "The concept of the "definitive text" corresponds only to religion or exhaustion."(Borges 69)

Supreme: Homodoxy versus Orthodoxy

One of the hallmarks of continuity is that it provides a model of assessment based on *correctness*, at least inasmuch as this can be measured by internal narrative consistency. Measured according to the guidelines of continuity, the goal of revision is therefore the attainment and preservation of cohesion. As has been discussed earlier, however, one of the hallmarks of multiplicity inevitably weakens the need to impose this as a standard for revision. Instead of a single, overarching continuity, several divergent, and often contradictory,

continuities co-exist. This liberates new texts from the impossible goal of consolidating all the disparate textual data that has accumulated around specific characters, instead allowing for multiple versions each with their own provisional and delimited continuities; there is thus no longer any demand to have all narrative versions of a character conform to each other as part of the "same" fictional world.

Despite this transformation, the notion of correctness as standard still applies, in some ways stronger than ever. While multiple continuities currently co-exist and cannot resolve into one comprehensive set of consistent versions and interpretations, each considered separately is more beholding to narrative cohesion than ever. Removed from the impossible conditions of continuity, errors can no longer be excused as the inevitable outcome of a unique generic tradition; since each new version can in effect construct its own rules unencumbered by the influence of prior versions, each can be judged according to the degree to which it is internally consistent.

However, the advantages of composing narratives under the conditions of multiplicity have frequently come at the cost of rejecting the distinctive generic quality of the superhero: the ineluctable presence of intertextual discontinuity. While *Planetary* incorporates textual acknowledgement of discontinuity, it does so through constructing narrative explanations that function as metatextual commentaries on revision; the Planetary team's resistance to the Four involves the archival restoration of the lipstick traces of the secret history of the genre so that future revisions can derive inspiration from the vast reservoir of dormant residual generic materials by framing revision in terms of memory and forgetting. Alan Moore's *Supreme: The Story of the Year* continues this trend. However, while *Planetary* explores the dynamics of discontinuity, it ultimately frames it in terms of conflict and resolution, or what Ellis calls *magic*

and loss (*The Fourth Man* 75). Moore creates a text that attempts to incorporate the discontinuities of the genre into a single narrative thread. The result is a kind of palimpsest in which each layer is clearly visible, and the various incompatible versions that comprise the history of the superhero coexist in what is presumed to be the normal state of affairs.

Supreme is a character created by artist Rob Liefeld in 1992, for Image Comics, a publishing company composed of artists and writers who left Marvel over disputes relating to the rights of creators, rather than their publishers, to profit from and exert control over their characters. While the early Image texts were often noteworthy for their visual quality, the characters and narratives were for the most part uninspiring derivations of classic Marvel and DC characters. Supreme was for all intents and purposes a generic offspring of Superman, filtered through the darker, more serious stylistic predilections of the 1990s.

In 1996, Alan Moore began working on the series. Faced with the inevitable task of revision that accompanies a publicized shift in creative direction, Moore chose the metatextual strategy of depicting Supreme as experiencing the process of his own revision. Thus, rather than the diegetic inscriptions of revision seen in Busiek and Ellis' narratives, in which different characters represent different modes of revisionary agency, *The Story of the Year* presents revision from the point of view of the text being revised.

The story begins with Supreme, suffering from loss of memory, returning to earth after the conclusion of the final storyline preceding Moore's assumption of creative control. His confusion increases dramatically upon encountering three alternative versions of himself: Sister Supreme, a black female version; Superion, a futuristic descendant; and Squeak the Supremouse, an anthropomorphic animal variant. Each of these variations on the Supreme theme represent

different moments in the textual history of the superhero: attempts to redress the overwhelming generic bias towards white male representations through the introduction of women and minority characters that began in the early 1970s; heroes of future variant continuities commonly postulated in the imaginary stories that Eco described; and products of the mixing of the superhero and funny animal genres such as Mighty Mouse. These versions inform "our" Supreme that a revision is about to take place, and lead him to the sanctuary of the Supremacy, a limbo dimension where earlier superseded and parallel versions of the characters who have at one time or many populated the Supreme continuity exist after being replaced by newer revisions:

> They're all there…Fat Supreme, Meka-Supreme and Grim 'Eighties Supreme. Every "What If" and kid sidekick—every Supremium delusion! Meanwhile in the crowd below are the love interests, all of the Diana Danes and Judy Jordans; all their friends, the Billy Fridays and the Lucas Tates! (*The Story of the Year* 30)

The discarded Supremes are themselves constructs of Moore's revision, and do not predate his composition of *The Story of the Year*. The textual history of Supreme extends back only to 1992; thus, the allusions that Moore incorporates into the story are not based on an actual textual past, but are part of his conscious attempt to compose on both the episodic and the serial levels of the superhero's characteristic double inscription simultaneously. By drawing upon the textual diversity of the genre's past as source material, Moore creates a parallel intertextual continuity that treats Supreme as if the character's history were isomorphic to that of the "real" fictional history of the character to which Supreme stands as analogue, imitation, and *homage*: Superman. The revised reality that Supreme explores once he leaves the Supremacy incorporates a vast number of slightly-altered elements from diverse periods within the Superman tradition:

the Citadel Supreme, a variation on Superman's Fortress of Solitude; the Prism-World of Amalynth, analogue of the bottled and shrunken city of Kandor; the League of Infinity, the Supreme universe's version of the Legion of Superheroes; as well as several "remembered" experiences of encounters with arch-nemesis Darius Dax, a Lex Luthor to Supreme's Superman. Each experience of the new reality is supplemented by the filling-in of memories of earlier versions based on sixty years of superhero texts, each drawn in styles representative of the era they are meant to evoke.

Moore's blending of fragments representing different eras and sensibilities does not critique or deconstruct the vestiges of earlier generic qualities as much as it reinvigorates them with their original imaginative force. An example occurs when Supreme encounters his Supermatons, robot duplicates that evoke the Superman robots that played a part in many stories published during the 1950s and 1960s, but have been absent from most recent Superman narratives. There are several plausible reasons for this shift: the decreasing reliance on storylines in which Superman's protection of his secret identity is the central plot device; changing generic and cultural attitudes towards robotics and artificial intelligence; the gradual decline of the dominant character traits of Superman as omnipotent and paternal master of his domain.

One can readily imagine a revised version of this vestigial aspect of the intertext that emphasizes nostalgia for a lost past, or else uses the robots to critique older generic presuppositions regarding sentience and agency. Instead, Moore juxtaposes a "remembered" sequence, in which the robots, who repeatedly address him as *master*, help him conceal his identity from his entourage of recurrent friends, with a "current" one in which S-1, "the only one capable of independent thought" (81), rebels against Supreme by trying to take his place. The effect of this juxtaposition is not that of the counter-narrative, whereby we see the logical

implications of the naivety of the earlier treatment of the theme; nor is it one of rupture, which emphasizes the incompatibility of the two versions. The earlier depiction of Supreme's relationship with the Suprematons is not demeaned and discredited as much as it is supplemented by the new encounter. Supreme goes on to reprogram S-1, who, along with the rest of the Suprematons, continue to play secondary roles in *The Story of the Year*. However, the deeper themes of identity and consciousness that Moore has added are not abandoned; eventually, S-1 asserts his independence by assuming a new name, Talos, and leaving Supreme to start a new life for himself.

Instead of ignoring or explaining away differences between versions, Moore has created an interplay among multiplicities in which discontinuities are highlighted and celebrated. This inclusive strategy establishes a criterion for textual unity based less on the logical consistency of character and plot than on the resonance between even the most divergent discrepancies. Moore's description of his work on *The Story of the Year* is relevant to this approach:

> To some degree, Supreme is an archetypal big-guy superhero in a cape, who stands up as well as all the others. To some degree, that's what I wanted to do with all the characters. I want to make them archetypal. I want to give them that archetypal power that the best superheroes have… (5)

Moore's use of the term *archetypal* prompts a reconsideration of the relationship between the superhero and the mythic. The conventional reading of the connection between the superhero and mythology focuses on the analogous relationship between iconic characters such as Superman with mythic predecessors such as Heracles and Samson. Umberto Eco has already offered a *détournement* of this interpretive approach by focusing on the mythic as a narrative

mode that contributes to the superhero chronotope, rather than as repository of characters and exploits of which the superhero represents an updated version:

> The mythical character embodies a law, or a universal demand, and therefore must be in part *predictable* and cannot hold surprises for us: the character of a novel wants, rather, to be a man like anyone else, and what could befall him is as unforeseeable as what may happen to us. (109)

The mythic is thus characterized by the determinate nature of its story material, by the definitive fact that the stories being recounted have already been established: "....Hercules would be seen as someone who has a story, and this story would characterize his divine features. The story has taken place and can no longer be denied" (108).

Moore's approach to *Supreme* involves an additional sense in which the superhero can be described as mythic: the shared dilemma posed by the existence of versional variations within the story cycles of classical mythology and superhero continuity. Claude Lévi-Strauss justified his structuralist methodology in part because of its superior capacity to interpret myths in the face of the multiplicity of versions that often exist:

> Our method thus eliminates a problem which has, so far, been one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely, the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such. (Lévi-Strauss 217)

Classicist Robin Lane Fox observed that this ability to perceive variant versions of mythic narratives as consonant with each other to be a key point of contrast between pre-Christian and Christian concepts of religion in the Greek and Roman world:

> There was no pagan concept of heresy. To pagans, the Greek word *Hairesis* meant a school of thought, not a false and pernicious doctrine. …Among pagans, the opposite of "heterodoxy" was not "orthodoxy," but "homodoxy," meaning agreement. (31)

Thus, correctness is not measured by approximating the "right" version of a story or character. Instead, versions are acceptable according to whether or not they resonate closely enough to be perceived as cognates. Inconsistencies between versions of stories, such as Zeus' birthplace, or the name of Oedipus' mother/wife, were not perceived as problematic. This is a decidedly less literal and fundamentalist approach than that of orthodoxy. The notion of orthodoxy itself becomes problematic, a vestigial remnant of an inoperative approach to textuality.

The lack of orthodoxy as standard of evaluation does not grant equality to all versions; in *The Story of the Year*, there is an implicit privileging of two Supremes: the "current" Supreme, as the most recent avatar of revision; and the silver age Supreme, ruler of the Supremacy. However, this evaluative hierarchy must be contrasted with the rigidity involved in the declaration of one version as orthodox. In the first case, the criterion of elevation is the narrative function of the new Supreme as focaliser of the story; the reader sees the multiplicity of the superhero through his incarnation as most recent version. In the second case, the status is an acknowledgement of the collective reader response to the silver age version of Superman as the dominant, default

"norm" of the character. However, Moore presents this not as a threat to the creative expressivity of new versions, but rather as a major, yet not exclusive, source of their inspiration. The result is a challenge to orthodoxy that celebrates the imaginative joy of the earlier superhero texts without ignoring the realities of the present, both within and without the genre:

> What I'd like to do is to try and infuse this new '90s model type superhero with all the imaginative power of the superheroes of the previous 50 years. To give it that sort of humor and grace and see if we can come up with some composite that's viable for the next century. (*Story of the Year* 5)

Moore here articulates a version of the central paradox at the core of the practice of revision: that in the name of improving on the already written, we do not destroy that which makes it worth the effort in the first place. *The Story of the Year* attempts to negotiate this paradox in ways that honor the doubled nature of revision as both the caretaker of the previous text and the harbinger of the subsequent one.

Superhero narratives such as *The Story of the Year* and *Planetary* provide glimpses of approaches to revision that are both critical of traditional models as well as deeply rooted in the production of texts; thus, they serve as a potential bridge between the often-increasing distance separating theoretical critique and practical advice so common in contemporary composition studies. In this respect the composers of superhero fiction parallel the teacher of writing, so often situated amidst competing visions of composition as skill, as self-discovery, as ticket to entry into academic discourse, as institutional necessity. Like the unfolding tale of composition studies, the diachronic tradition of the superhero both shapes and is shaped by the struggle between competing, often contradictory demands of consistency and discontinuity, as well as of

the marketplace and creative expression. By grappling more creatively with the paradoxes of revision, perhaps composition can begin the process of reinvigorating and redefining the roles that revision can and will play in the future of the teaching and study of writing. To borrow the title of Grant Morrison's recent contribution to this generic trend, such an approach can be viewed as an opening move in developing composition pedagogies suitable for the *multiversity* rather than the *university*.

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Visualizing Abolition: Two Graphic Novels and a Critical Approach to Mass Incarceration for the Composition Classroom

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Visualizing Abolition: Two Graphic Novels and a Critical Approach to Mass Incarceration for the Composition Classroom

In order to engage my students in critical conversations about uses of language that complicate and compliment the material, political, and economic realities of American lives, I began, in 2010, to specifically structure my introductory university writing course around the ways we think and talk about democratic ideals and social justice. The U.S. prison system inevitably surfaces in readings and conversations. While there is some disagreement about the exact number of Americans incarcerated, Wagner and Sakala (2014) reported that 2.4 million adults were being held in state and federal prisons at the time of their latest report, and more than 2 million more were under custodial supervision. The increasing frequency with which incarceration has been used as a solution to problems over the last four decades has left conditions in American prisons dangerous and unhealthy.

I initially supported writing assignments with texts by Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Michelle Alexander, and other familiar names in prison studies. Students looked for and found the origins and outcomes of mass incarceration in cycles of poverty, in unequal access to education, in the unequal and prejudiced distribution of resources like food and housing, and, especially, in the criminal legal system itself. I was impressed and satisfied with the depth of our in-class conversations, but when students began to submit writing assignment drafts, I found that my predominantly middle-class, White students had dismissed the readings and reverted to pre-existing opinions about justice, inequality, and crime. These students were protected by (and protective of) their social privilege, and the things they read did not transfer beyond the summaries I asked them to write. While they could identify problems in the legal system, they did so without a sense of importance or urgency. They reported inequalities but they did not feel the violence and injury of incarceration, and they had little awareness of the millions of lives that had been destroyed.

I supplemented the texts, but my students complained that my assigned readings on racism and homo and trans-phobias were too angry. They felt that while there may be validity in the data, the tone invalidated the arguments as hasty and in-credible. Students with developing fluency in academic discourse usually describe academic writing as primarily "cold" and "emotionless." They feel that academic inquiry should be objective, although their understanding of objectivity includes both formal (depersonalized grammar) and epistemic (dehistoricized content). The anger in the texts I assigned was not accidental or incidental, but my students did not understand. Building on Foucault's explanation of power working in reverse and Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," Heather Love (2009) explains objectivity as an ideological

agent and says that "feeling backward" or re-fusing the analytical with the personal in critical inquiry "lays bare the conditions of exclusion and inequality and it gestures toward alternative trajectories for the future." Objectivity legitimizes apathy as a means of depowering rage and stabilizing would be revolution. In other words, interrupting their common sense narratives about crime would mean breaking down the barriers that students erect between themselves and the lives wrecked by legislated disparity.

This belief that writing is a depoliticized, mechanical skill is at the center of what my course intends to interrupt. Discourse is, after all, often what convinces a police officer or judge to release rather than detain. Stigmatized dialects and language variation create impressions, and the (in)ability of defendants to articulate a defense can determine the outcome of a legal inquiry, whether on the street or in the courtroom. Yasuko Kanno (2010) cautions against enacting a "symbolic violence" through pedagogies that privilege middle class culture "as if it were inherently more valuable than the cultures of the working class and the poor." Limiting conversations about the political exigency of anger not only reinforces the logo-centrism of Western hegemony but also the marginalization of multilingual students and students of color.

In my early attempts at this course, I realized that my ability to meaningfully engage students in conversations that challenge status-quo attitudes and ideas about crime is contingent upon students' ability to connect the lives of others to their own. My course was failing to provide an accessible emotive appeal that could help students to see through others' eyes. Students far removed from the legal system, I found, needed to *feel* the isolation and desperation of near-permanent poverty and mass incarceration, and they needed texts that linked the ways they consume media away from school with the ways I was asking them to approach texts in class.

Numerous scholars have written about the ability of graphic novels to bridge literacies and to infuse texts with pathos. The National Council for Teachers of English (2005) states that graphic novels "can be used as a 'point of reference' to bridge what students already know with what they have yet to learn." Students can approach visual media as a meeting point with their lives rather than as a departure, and look to the ways visual rhetoric complicates conventional readings, especially around particularly affective topics. Joddy Murray (2009) contrasts the rhetoric of contemporary mixed media with plain text in ways that emphasize the ideological nature of sequential meaning making:

> [Graphic media] is symbolized language, but it is a form not limited to the chain-of-reasoning we require in discursive text. Its strength, in part, is that it can accommodate meaning unsuited to sequencing – unutterable, affective, ephemeral – and that there are connections through images that may lead to further articulation.

> The value of non-discursive text, therefore, is that it thrives and derives its meaning from the complexity and ambiguity of the medium.

While the texts I introduced provided students with perspective and data, they did so in a manner that reinforced a pre-existing, logo-centric epistemology. Graphic novels, however, can challenge students' ideas as well as their ways of thinking by creating meanings that contradict the logic of capitalism and its reliance upon an objective anti-pathos. James Bucky Carter (2013) explains that reading text and visual representation together is less of a logical, cognitive process of translation or code-switching, and is, instead, "something more akin to transcended comprehension; something more akin to... *literacy.*" Working from these ideas, I assigned two graphic novels that I had been using in my own research, and I paired them with a dialectical journaling activity. The results were astoundingly successful.

What follows is an overview. The following sections include my course rationale, an overview of the two novels I use, and a description of my journaling assignment with some anecdotes of its success. This description is intended to allow others to benefit from my failures and continue the conversations started in my class; however, I do caution that different locations and populations will bring students into the conversation in different places with challenges that may differ from those I experienced. Students who have struggled with the criminal legal system will have a vastly different perspective than those who have never been in the back seat of a police car. My approach is built around bringing students' own ideas into dialog with popular perspectives that counter mainstream media. Focusing on students' ideas in the context of current events should allow students to find their own way-in from whatever subject position they occupy, but teachers should, of course, be ready to modify and supplement what I have done.

Rationale: Complicity in a Criminal Anti-Democracy

Justice has become a shifting concept in the United States as the public is becoming increasingly aware of disconnects between purported democratic values and the application and enforcement of laws. In May 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the state of California to release 30,000 prisoners because, as Justice Kennedy explained, "the medical and mental health care provided by California's prisons has fallen short of minimum constitutional requirements and has failed to meet prisoners' basic health needs" (Hing). Pervasive overcrowding has exceeded even the massive capacity of the Golden State, and others are not far behind. It has become clear that the United States simply does not have the material and economic resources to maintain its reliance upon incarceration as a solution to social and economic problems.

Further, acts of state sponsored violence on the street have become so numerous and egregious as to be un-ignorable even by those whose social and economic privileges remove them from harm's way. In April 2015, Daily Kos writer Shaun King reported that more people had been killed in March by police officers in the United States than had been killed by police in the UK *since 1900*. Responding to police shootings of unarmed Black men in Baltimore, in Fergusson, in Florida, and in Oakland, Hillary Clinton (2015) stated in a keynote address that patterns of racism in the enforcement of law "have become unmistakable and undeniable" and demonstrate that "there is something profoundly wrong" with our criminal legal system. Changed laws and social norms have quieted some overtly racist behaviors, but the criminalization of specific lifestyles has institutionalized racial disparity and legitimated state violence. According to Department of Justice census data, Black men make up more than half of the adult prison population, while comprising less than 15% of the U.S. population (Bureau 2010). Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans are far more likely than White Americans to be stopped, searched, and detained by police, and White Americans, even when arrested, are far less likely to be sentenced even if they are found guilty of a crime.

Once classified by the criminal legal system, social and economic disadvantage is masked by blame and a pervasive sense of righteous indignation. Media reports omit the economic and political circumstances of a community in favor of reporting only the "facts" of an event. This lapse reinforces a link between criminality and behavior rather than with exigencies like limited access to education and entire neighborhoods stripped of working age adults. Laws that target specific neighborhoods and communities are sold to the public as proportional, directed responses to crime rather than as discursive technologies that play a role in determining what crime is and where it will occur. Michele Foucault (1980) tells us that the modern discourse of criminology emerges from "within the social body, rather than from above it" in order to justify specific relations of power. As members of society are classified and criminalized and crimes are reported by the media, the public sphere fractures and turns in on itself. The new common sense says that because we have so many crimes, we must have a predator lurking just around the next corner. Popular TV crime dramas like Law and Order, Criminal Minds, and Orange is the New Black coalesce with news reports to amplify and validate feelings of fear and vulnerability. Instead of seeking ways to alleviate inequities, we are taught to fear and blame.

The recursive system of media reports, legislative response, and police policy shifts creates a "common sense" mythology of who and what we understand as "criminal." Mainstream media reports warn us to look towards each other, and especially towards Others, in order to spot criminals that have not yet been identified. After presenting panels with video scenarios depicting possible

crimes, Justin T. Pickett and other researchers from The Sentencing Project (2014) found that White respondents "overestimate the proportion of crime committed by people of color and associate people of color with criminality" *even when no crime was committed.* In a daily media barrage, White middle class property owners are shown decontextualized, dehistoricized "evidence" of people of color committing crimes as *de facto* proof that people of color commit more crimes, and this proof has become widely accepted. Racism, which has become publically unpalatable in overt acts, has been renamed "neighborhood watch" and "broken windows policing" and used to justify acts that would otherwise be irreconcilable with democratic ideals. Rates of arrest and incarceration *seem* to validate stereotypes of violent, uneducated people of color, and, as a result, our nation's prisons, jails, and police cars are filled past capacity, mostly with people of color.

The public is, however, starting to recognize connections between criminality, history, and economics, and public discourse is beginning to shift away from redesigning policies and towards redefining justice. As political activists and leaders admit the accumulation of unexplained, specific failures, they are starting to consider that widespread inequities are evidence of a misconceived system inspired by a faulty conceit. The prison is not broken; it does just what it was ideologically designed to do: it segregates and disappears populations deemed to be offensively surplus. For the students in my university classroom, however, state-sponsored injustice remains largely an exotic, foreign problem. They are shielded by middle class economic advantages and by the cultural privileges afforded to White Americans. They speak in dialects, wear clothing, and frequent neighborhoods that profiling overlooks. Fears of arrest, detention, and police violence are easily dismissed, and when they are forced to confront the evidence, they blame violence on the victims. These students are voters and future policy makers, yet they have little understanding of the disparity between touted American ideals and the violence and oppression committed in all of our names.

Democracy is dependent upon each generation understanding the ways that uses of language direct the distribution of resources and the application of law, yet it seems that many students are comfortable with ignorance. My students frequently endorse aggressive policing, punitive incarceration, and a retributive approach to criminality, yet they struggle when they are asked for a rationale. They rely uncritically on television and internet pundits for opinions, but they do not ask for nor seek evidence to support their assertions. Their criteria for evaluating media seem to be alignment with pre-existing beliefs and congruency with the tenets of neoliberalism. They see education as workplace training and media as truth, when it agrees with what they've heard before. Henry Giroux (2011) explains the effect of this epistemology:

> The calculating logic of an instrumentalized, corporatized, and privatized education does more than diminish the moral and political vision necessary to sustain a vibrant democracy and an engaged notion of social agency; it also undermines the development of public spaces where matters of dissent, public conscience, and social justice are valued and offered protection against the growing anti-democratic tendencies that are enveloping much of the United States and many other parts of the world.

Not only does students' rejection of authentic critical thinking about economic and political trends limit the transfer of course content but also it threatens to perpetuate systems and cycles of poverty, disenfranchisement, and exclusion to become near-permanent qualities. Instead, as Giroux says, our students must see that language use, especially in the information age of social media, is a "fundamentally political act" (40).

Students often don't see it, but an explicit consideration of argument and critical thinking through a process of inventing, drafting, and revising has an important role in countering anti-democratic narratives. John Duffy (2012) explains that the first year writing course "engages students, inevitably and inescapably, in questions of ethics, values, and virtues." The writing process and academic readers' expectations for accountability and respect challenge students' uncritical reliance on "common sense" ideas and instead direct them to question and authentically learn. In the context of writing assignments and classroom activities, it is difficult to reconcile democratic ideals with institutions that are explicitly designed to aristocratize (de-democratize) by removing the people, the demos, from democracy. By demonstrating how uses of language can mask or reveal contradictions between idealization and application, students can understand the ways we collectively perpetuate injustices through our daily uses of language. However, our ability to demonstrate this is contingent upon the texts we bring to the class and the ways we engage students with them.

Textbooks: Two Graphic Novels and a Plan for Abolition

Most existing textbooks about U.S. prison policy reinforce a largely unchallenged ideological framework of prison reform; reformers believe that incarceration is a generally sound concept that has, at times, just been poorly executed. As a result, policy changes are implemented to improve specific conditions but without substantive changes to the institution or to the distribution of arrests. There has, in the last decade, been a shift in the national conversation and more attention has been paid to the abhorrent conditions faced by prisoners. However, only a fraction of this conversation has been directed towards decreasing our reliance upon incarceration as a principle means of responding to

problems. *Race to Incarcerate* and *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix* introduce an alternate ideology of prison *abolition* wherein we replace incarceration with education, healthcare (including mental health support) and economic assistance in the form of job support, housing options, and food assurance. In meaningfully different ways, these two texts trace the development of modern incarceration from its roots in slavery in order to demonstrate its essential anti-democratic nature. In doing so, they seek not only a change in the national conversation but a paradigmatic shift in our thinking as well.

Figure 1. Two graphic novels on incarceration. Personal photo by author.

To accomplish this ideological turn, these graphic novels engage readers in a broad, systemic overview but achieve depth through contextualized examples. The use of illustrations alongside narration and textual annotation unpacks difficult intersections of seemingly disparate issues. Media reports tend to reduce complex topics into seemingly isolated "issues." For example, prison overcrowding in California has been frequently written about in news reports but often without any consideration of the economic exclusions experienced by prisoners upon release. As Lois Ahrens (2008) points out, the inability of parolees to secure employment is a significant factor in recidivism and thus a major contributing factor to prison populations. The oversimplification of criminality invariably masks or completely efface the systemic from media analyses. When shown only the arrest report of an incarcerated person of color, voters (dis)miss

the historical roots of crime that lie in disenfranchisement, poverty, and limited access to material and economic resources. What makes these two texts more effective than traditional textbooks for use in the classroom is their ability to *accessibly* demonstrate these crucially central intersections and their ability to infuse this content with *feeling*.

Published in 2008, the *Real Cost of Prisons Comix* collects three previously published graphic-essays and brackets them with a critical introduction by prison activist-scholars Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, and reader response letters written by activists, scholars, and teachers who have used the original comics in their work. The collection features a preface explaining the choice of the "comic book" medium as well. While accessibility and publication efficiency is a significant attribute to a book intended to be read by students and activists, the visual medium also allows these novels to operate on a level that precedes and parallels readers' conscious analysis of its content. The images "speak" to students on an emotional level as well as an intellectual one, and, as I mentioned previously, the images interrupt students' reliance on a linear sense of logic.

Despite being illustrated by several artists, uniform, near-monotone grey-wash backgrounds capture the monotony and mundane existence of the prisoner. Importantly, this powerful use of the visual suggests a place for the observer in the text. Each image we see embodies a way of seeing of its own. As John Berger (1973) explains, viewers of an image "never look at just one thing; [they] are always looking at the relation between things and [them]selves." The reader of this text is invited to add her own experiences to her interpretation bringing her into the content in a very personal way. This is a crucial and central element of this book. The writers who make up the pieces of this collection want us, above all, to understand that democracy, or its floundering, is the result of citizen participants' actions. The *Real Cost of Prison Comix* dispels the mythology of the far-off prison and the exotic prisoner and instead shows readers our inevitable complicity in the propagation of the prison industrial complex and reveals prisoners as our friends, neighbors, and selves occupying a dramatically different but closely related space.

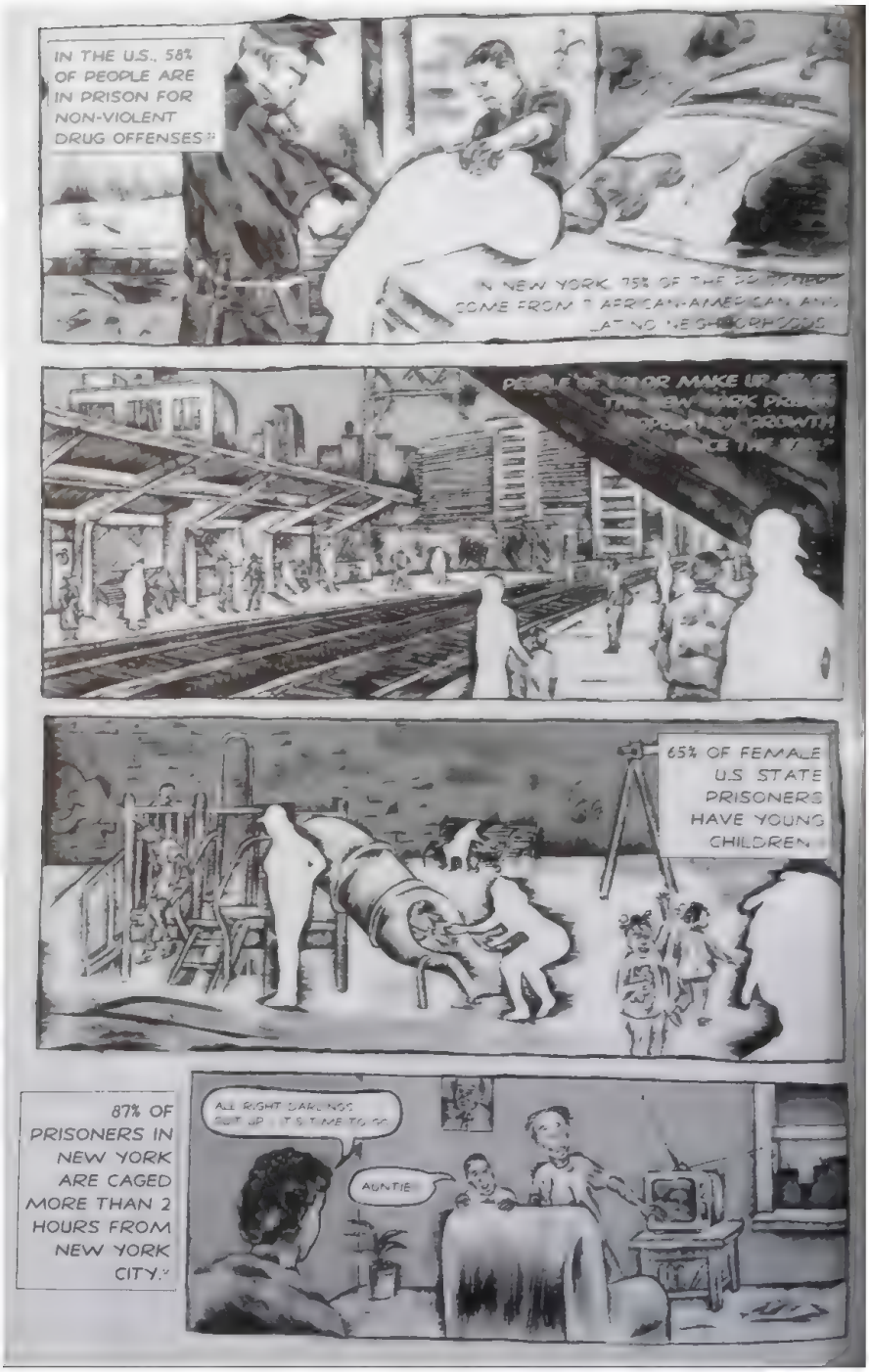
IN THE U.S., 58% OF PEOPLE ARE IN PRISON FOR NON-VIOLENT DRUG OFFENSES.
65% OF FEMALE U.S STATE PRISONERS HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN.
87% OF PRISONERS IN NEW YORK ARE CAGED MORE THAN 2 HOURS FROM NEW YORK CITY.
AUNTIE

Figure 2. Use of greys to evoke emotion. *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix.*

The essays divide the book into three segments that can be read individually in support of a specific discussion or together as a more comprehensive picture of incarceration's effect on US society. Each section is followed by a glossary and a notes page that provides citation information and starting points for additional research. Furthermore, each is followed by a "readers respond" column where letters submitted by readers have been reprinted. These sections include letters from notable social justice activists like Howard Zinn and Marc Mauer; letters written by representatives of advocacy organizations like National Advocates for Pregnant Women and The Harm Reduction Coalition; and letters from students and teachers who have used the book academically. These letters not only offer praise but also point out ways that readers have built upon the text to engage others in conversations and activities.

The first essay, "Prison Town," offers readers a modeled city, "Anytown USA," and several first-name characters and narrates the events common to cities and towns around the country that built prisons in the 1980's and 90's. By alternating between dialogue bubbles and annotated charts, graphs, and images, this section dispels the economic myths around prison expansion and explains what expansions meant for both those incarcerated and those who lived in the towns where the prisons were built. In an included response letter, Howard Zinn points out that this section is particularly effective at demonstrating "how poverty and desperation bring people into a system which then exploits them for the profit of a prison-industrial complex." "Prison Town" demonstrates the ways that promises of local benefits and booming local economies actually play out as a loss of local autonomy and local family sovereignty in favor of national corporations' profits.

"Prisoners of the War on Drugs" profiles individuals who experience overlapping aspects of the criminal legal system. Stories titled "Bobby," "Yvonne, "and "Sam & Alec" are used to unpack the influence our inherited ideologies of racism and sexism complicate a legal process purportedly designed to protect people with less social and economic affluence. This essay addresses a middle class, primarily white audience to consider the origins of sentencing and prison population demographics and how these interact with the way we think about crime. Using the story of two similar teenagers who each resort to drugs as a means of self-medicating, the essay challenges readers to understand the historical exegeses that lead a white youth involved in drugs into counseling and recovery with charges dropped while a similar Black youth goes to prison then is left homeless and unemployable once released. Moving from the specific pictures of each individual story into a broader discussion of U.S. drug policy, the section encapsulates the difficult intersection of ideology and policy.

The last essay, "Prisoners of a Hard Life: Women & Their Children," uses biographical profiles of real women to demonstrate the causes and "costs" of

incarceration that are particular to women and to their children. This section surpasses the familiar "convict" narrative genre, however. As explained in a letter from teacher Jody Sokolower, these stories narrate the women's situations without reducing their complicated histories to a series of "don't make the same mistake I did" anecdotes. This section's profiles help readers to contextualize the "mistakes" made by women against lifetimes of abuse, neglect, and legislated criminality – one of the more difficult aspects of incarceration for an audience with middle class privilege to understand is the pervasity of limited or non-existent options and the ways that (drug) policy is written to marginalize those who do not fit into a social mold. The supposed "mistakes" of these women are contrasted against the greater faults of a society that distributes resources first to those who already have much and then punishes those who have few.

The book concludes with a section titled "Change is Possible," which provides summaries of specific terms and topics. More than a simple glossary, these extended definitions explain possible "next steps" and alternatives to the contemporary incarceration-centric legal system.

Figure 3. The cost of incarceration vs. college. *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix*.

If this book has a shortcoming, it is in its single edition publication run. Since the book was published in 2006, the criminal legal system has changed somewhat (for both better and worse) and updates could insure the book's continued relevancy. While there are no glaring inaccuracies, the expansion of private prisons and prison industries in the US are somewhat absent. Fortunately *Race to Incarcerate: a Graphic Retelling* was published a few years later and neatly complements the stories and artwork of *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix*.

In a brief forward, prison activist-scholar Michelle Alexander explains that for over a decade, the all-text edition of *Race to Incarcerate* was her immediate recommendation to "anyone who wanted to understand how and why we became the world leader in imprisonment." Published in 2013, *Race to Incarcerate: a Graphic Retelling* is a visual adaptation of the original activist anchor-text. Author Marc Mauer has been an activist involved with and leading programs seeking to change criminal legal policy for over 30 years, and he is the writer of some of the most widely distributed work in the field. For this rendering, Mauer partnered with activist-artist Sabrina Jones in an attempt to reach an even wider audience. Unlike the three individually written and illustrated essays of *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix*, this novel's single-style graphics brings a sense of continuity that links seemingly separate topics through similar art.

HOW DID WE GET SUCH RACIAL DISPARITY BEHIND BARS?
PEOPLE OF COLOR
ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ARRESTED.
BUT NOT SO MUCH MORE THAT IT WOULD FULLY EXPLAIN THE DISPARITY.
POLICE
RACIAL PROFILING INCREASES MINORITIES' ODDS OF HAVING CRIMINAL RECORDS.
POLICE
THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE STOPPED.
ONCE STOPPED, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SEARCHED. THEREFORE-
ONCE ARRESTED, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE CRIMINAL HISTORIES, WHICH TRIGGER LONGER SENTENCES.

Figure 4. Contrast to emphasize political-economic disparity. *Race to Incarcerate*.

Race to Incarcerate uses a 3rd person style that seems journalistic and objective, but employs art that does not suppress horror and rage. Jones's striking heavy black and white style conveys the feelings of fear and desperation common to those whose lives have been ripped apart by incarceration. Jones forgoes dialog bubbles and, instead, favors the borders familiar to comic strips and comic art. These familiar boxes, in this context, not only allow for adding annotation and textual references alongside (rather than in) the graphic images but also create a sense of bordering that activates the images in powerful ways. In places, the white space gutters cut dramatically against the black images to suggest the cold steel

bars and restraints that contain and constrain the black bodies populating our prisons and jails. The pairing of factual tone with powerful emotions reinforces the novel's overwhelming strength: this book expertly yet clearly explains the evolutions of policy and belief that grew alongside (the often manufactured) fears of a violent, racialized other.

Angela Davis (2005) describes the prison as "an institution deeply connected to the *maintenance* of racism." *Race to Incarcerate* interrupts the popularly held belief that incarceration is a response to crime and instead demonstrates that the era of massive prison expansion was a response to civil rights. What is commonly sold to media consumers as the "natural" back and forth of crime and legislation is demonstrated to be the exploitation of xenophobia and the positioning of the police as enforcing agents of a hegemonic white culture. U.S. voters were taught to fear those who resisted the drug policies that were tearing apart communities, while harsh parole conditions and stripped social support budgets essentially ensured once in the system, few ever get out. Even fewer ever vote again. In July 2012, the Huffington Post reported that more than 5 million adults had been legislatively disenfranchised (McLaughlin). This is more than the balance of the many twentieth century presidential elections, including both elections that resulted in the presidencies of George W. Bush.

In order to unpack the complicated political history that subtends criminality, *Race to Incarcerate* is organized into sections named for policy eras such as "The Rise of the Tough on Crime Movement," "The Triumph of Tough on Crime," and "Color-Coded Justice," with an interlude of 3 sections titled according to associated presidential term; the first of these is "Crime as Politics: The Reagan Bush Years." By drawing connections between policy evolutions and the approving presidents and their appointed leaders the text helps to complicate the familiar republican/democrat binary and explain that not only have presidents from both parties have been complicit in the explosive growth of the prison industrial complex but also that the adversarial nature of the two party system fueled the escalation.

For example, the section entitled "Crime as Politics: The Clinton Years" juxtaposes Attorney General Janet Reno's research and advocacy against mandatory minimums against the partisan posturing that led President Clinton, in 1994, to champion the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This bill was sold as a "balanced approach" but served to reallocate money from social programs into the already "bloated prison system." This novel's placing of the bill into its historical-political context shows readers how the villainization of those perceived to be "soft on crime" led a liberal champion to counter the work of his own appointed officials and support a destructive shift in policy. The criminal-legal empire is the product of political party tension and public perception.

Race to Incarcerate explains the ways that national politics build upon a legacy of systemic racism as both product and producer of incarceration, but it is conspicuously quiet on the targeting of lesbian, gay, and trans people by the criminal legal system. As explained by Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock (2011), if we are to have any meaningful discussions about democratic, productive alternatives to the prison, "the role of policing in upholding systems of gendered power relations, conventional notions of morality, and sexual conformity cannot be overlooked." Criminality is legislated to sequester those deemed offensive to a presumed public morality. The enforcement of hegemonic gender and sex normativity is as pervasive as the marginalization of people of color. Those whose lives are intersections of profiled, othered identities, transgender women of color in particular, are even more likely to become enmeshed in the criminal legal system. As certain gender identities and certain sexual orientations are marked as deviant and aberrant, they become ostracized even within excluded communities. Discrediting a public by fragmenting, discrediting, and incarcerating are powerful tools for silencing opposition. Resistant stories and lives are effectively erased.

When students learn to view locally significant topics through multiple perspectives and weigh political import from positions outside those represented in mainstream media, they begin to understand the nuanced ways in which discourse lobbies tremendous influence over the production and reception of meaning. *Race to Incarcerate* concludes with a section, "A New Direction," that profiles community policing, the movement of local governments towards re-entry programs, and the possibility of restorative justice. Importantly, this overview places an emphasis on the complicity and agency of each reader although it is implied more than it is stated outright. Nevertheless, the addendum/appendix section that follows the graphic text directs readers to "Write a Prisoner" and challenges readers with a specific call to activate their learning. By fostering engagement, the text becomes a valuable mechanism for demonstrating how public perceptions of criminality are tied tightly to the future of democracy.

Journaling Activity: A Pedagogy for Writing out Prisons

While the two graphic texts that I chose clearly demonstrate the intense anguish of lives destroyed and explain the political discourse that led there, students, particularly middle class, White students, can sometimes still feel removed and distanced. Analyzing community engagement projects, Linda Flower (2008) has written that in order for students to be successful in transferring abstract, academic ideas to daily, public life, they must create a space that is "both political and personal." Students need to connect the perspectives of

others with political ideology in a way that explains both perspectives. Contemporary political discourses, as well as most mainstream news media, instead favors of a persuasive version of rhetoric that is one view versus another. Rather than account for perspectives, consumers are taught to impeach one in favor of another, and because media replicates the popular views of hegemony, media rhetoric tends to establish its truth by impeaching an other.

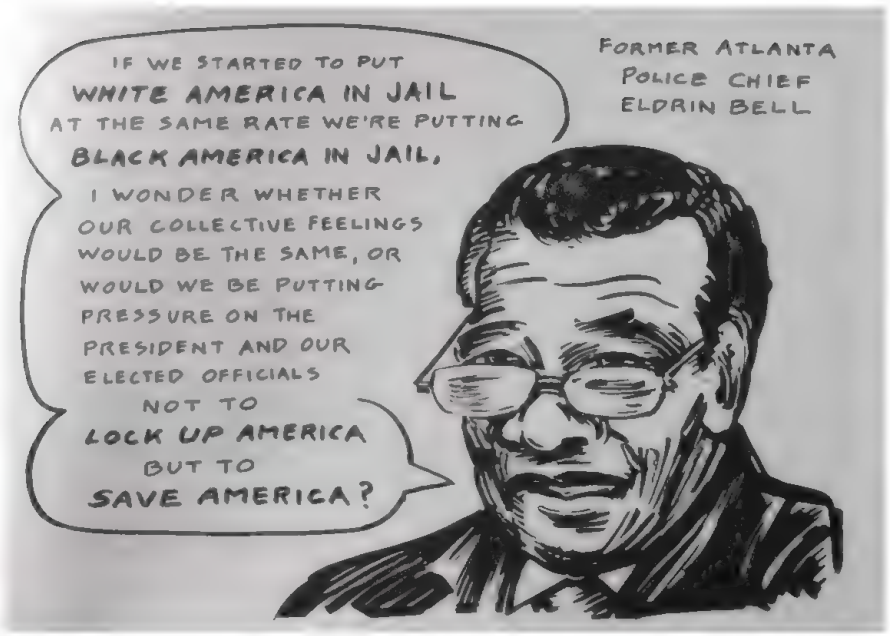
IF WE STARTED TO PUT WHITE AMERICA IN JAIL AT THE SAME RATE WE'RE PUTTING BLACK AMERICA IN JAIL, I WONDER WHETHER OUR COLLECTIVE FEELINGS WOULD BE THE SAME, OR WOULD WE BE PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE PRESIDENT AND OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT TO LOCK UP AMERICA BUT TO SAVE AMERICA?
FORMER ATLANTA POLICE CHIEF ELDRIN BELL

Figure 5. Racism is often unnoticed by those who benefit. *Race to Incarcerate.*

However, rhetoric teaches us that ideology and language are not deterministic and hegemony can be resisted and changed. Victor Villanueva (1992) explains that opposition to hegemony endures "when there is widespread socio-historical criticism. Voices of discontent look back to the roots of oppression and articulate the socio-historical precedents . . . The voices seek to persuade all groups that everyone's needs could be better met if substantive changes were to take place." Historicizing "common sense" points to the rhetorical construction and constructedness of truths held as natural and immutable. In other words, what seems to be a seamless progression of common sense ideas is revealed as the function of politicized discourse in service of dominant culture. Or, as Bruce Herzberg (1994) explains, sustained ideological critique through pedagogy is dependent on students' ability to "transcend their own deeply ingrained belief in individualism and meritocracy." When faced with culminating personal evidence, the familiar terms and concepts of justice, crime,

and safety that students believed to be natural and stable are revealed to be constructed and contingent.

To accommodate this challenge, I supplement reading assignments with frequent entries in a "media journal" that encourages students to put our course texts into conversation with local media reports. A variation on the familiar dialectical journal, this version asks students to use facing and opposite notebook pages as two columns where they summarize and respond using text and illustration as they see fit. On the left page, they briefly summarize, describe, or illustrate local media reports of crime or court proceedings. These are most frequently from television news, but I also accept radio and internet texts, video, and audio reports. I specifically exclude dramatizations and fictionalized stories. On the right page, I ask students to respond and to put the stories into conversation with the texts we read. As we move through the course, I ask students to add to the journal, but I also ask them to revisit past entries to build conversations from their observations. They are required to not only summarize but also to contextualize by linking events to the texts we read, to ideas and conversations shared with classmates, and, importantly, to other events that happen during the course. Often, these intersections lead students to research questions that show up in semester projects, and they often reference entries in their journals as moments when their thinking changed.

While they are required to write in the journal, I also encourage students to include illustrations. Often the freedom to draw and color in the journal, rather than being restricted to writing alone, offers students a way to process emotions (both theirs and those involved in a reported story) that their academic fluency doesn't allow. I believe that the success of this activity is in the incremental processing that students undertake. I believe that my previous failure was in placing students who are used to be comfortable and believe their worldviews to be stable into unstable, uncomfortable spaces without adequate support. When students start to understand ideologies and start to see the ways ideology rhetorically maintains hegemony, they can feel disloyal to their family, their church, and their country. When given a means of processing these feelings and a staged process through which to validate and test new ideas, students are less apt to reject the new ways of seeing the world. This has been frequently demonstrated in students' end of term projects.

I only assess students' participation in the journal. I collect them periodically and record process-points for completed entries. I do provide feedback, usually in the form of questions, although the journals also have been a source for mini lessons on grammar and genre conventions. At the end of the semester, I assess the course by portfolio, and these have become the assessment mechanism for my curriculum as well. Like most, I assign a cover letter in which students explain the included assignments, but unlike most, I require that students

respond to a cover letter prompt that focuses their letter as an argument rather than merely as a self-reflection. Specifically, I ask them to explain what responsible writing "is" using their writing assignments and their journal entries as evidence. While my students can choose which of their formal assignments to include, they are required to include excerpts from the journal, and they are required to explain the choices they've made and the ways that the course readings guided or complicated those decisions. I gauge the effectiveness of my course, in part, through these letters.

The journaling activity has yielded exciting meta-analysis in my students' cover letters. Previously, students largely discarded the conversations and ideas represented in their summaries and used the cover letter to describe process and style. Invention was only tangentially referenced. Since implementing the new activity and texts, students more often explain connections between the course readings and events outside the classroom. One students' response from a recent course stands out:

> I thought between my college education so far, my life experience (of all of 22 years), and my natural smarts I had a good understanding of how the world works; I didn't, or at least not nearly as good an understanding as I thought I did. Issues like racism, sexism, homelessness and the like were topics I knew I didn't have a lot of first-hand experience in dealing with but thought my academic career and general life experience would help me firmly understand them at the wizened old age of 22. Never did I think that I would come to find out the gap between what I thought I knew and what appears to be true would be so large, or that this revelation would come in a [composition] course . . . This seems particularly prudent given the unrest in the last couple weeks in Baltimore, resulting from the death of Freddie Gray in police custody. . . African-American's frustration and resentment towards law enforcement, the criminal justice system, etc. stems from historical systematic racism against African-Americans and other minorities. Much of this historical systematic racism used the way policy, laws, and other documents are written as means to subjugate minorities.

The purpose of the course is to provide students with ways of thinking critically about the world around them and to give them a means to share their thoughts that demonstrates credibility and careful attention to evidence. In other words, I have designed the course to evoke questions. This student concluded his cover letter explaining his questioning process:

> To be a socially responsible writer is to be aware that your work, however small or insignificant it may seem, has consequences in

> the real world, and that your work helps contribute to the wider social commentary. Therefore a socially responsible writer makes an effort to ensure that contribution to the social commentary is a positive one. To do that, a socially responsible writer must be aware of what is really going on in society, they have a duty to investigate and ask questions about the society we live in, like for example why are black men massively over-represented in the prison population? Being a socially responsible writer means understanding that there is systemic injustice and societal issues in the world we live in. It also means being aware of one's own biases and the stereotypes one might hold, and working to shed those biases and stereotypes . . . What a socially responsible writer cannot do is ignore or actively deny there are not serious issues with the society we live in, and not make an effort to correct it.

As they write and discuss, students start to recognize the contradictions that are tearing at our public sphere, and, more importantly, they begin to seem themselves as *participating* in public discourse rather than practicing it.

Conclusion: What's Next?

The addition of the two graphic novels and the journaling activity has improved my course in ways that far exceeded my expectations. Students are writing more cohesive, engaged essays, and they report applying their ideas outside of the class. Some students have even joined organizations (both on and off campus) that continue conversations about the language of social justice. I am now planning applications of this curriculum for other courses, and I am considering ways to adapt the curriculum to incorporate mixed media and web technologies. The use of illustrations has limited journals to "pen and paper" texts rather than online spaces as most of my students are not comfortable drawing online. They believe that sketching or "scribbling" in notebooks is private and can be done by anyone; however, they believe that opening a program and using tools to illustrate online makes the work somehow more permanent and less private, even on a secure course management website. While this legitimacy could help to validate their work as participation in a larger conversation, it also can shut down some students who feel their artistry inadequate for shared space. As technology proliferates, I believe these barriers will soften allowing illustrations to be done online with little resistance.

In the documentary film *Visions of Abolition*, Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2011) call for a political ideology of prison abolition that is nuanced and multifaceted. Rather than attempting to abruptly reverse the deep history of racist exclusion with a single vote, they suggest education and

incremental moves towards the deconstruction of mass incarceration and the reinventing of an authentic democracy. Our composition classrooms have a significant role to play in developing and maintaining a critical public. They can be spaces where students are both simultaneously safe to process new ways of thinking and supported in that thinking with readings and discussions that provide new perspectives. Embracing the visual media that many students use away from school bridges the academic world with the world outside, and students become community members rather than community observers. As former senator Bill Bradley (2012) said, democracy "starts with one person. And we simply have to understand democracy is not a vicarious experience. And in the Internet age, apathy should not be an option." Through reading and learning that are initially unfamiliar and uncomfortable, our students learn citizenship as a process of participation and start to understand that it is up to them whether or not we tax our citizens with the very real "costs" of incarceration.

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The Role of Critical Thinking in Reader Perceptions of Leadership in Comic Books

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THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN READER PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN COMIC BOOKS

Introduction

Comic book characters and stories are becoming increasingly present in popular media formats, such as video games, television, and film. In addition, comic books are continuing to be used in educational settings as learning tools. Numerous organizations and websites provide materials and curriculum for educators to use and to implement comic books in their classrooms. As the use of comics in education continues to increase, educators need more research that supports the use of comics for specific outcomes. Furthermore, continued research on the educational benefits of comic books can help educators use the medium to address specific problems seen within their own classrooms. In a Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Fisher, and Frey study (2011/2012) they determined that teachers agreed that comics can be useful in the classroom, but a deficiency existed with how to integrate them appropriately into curriculum. In addition, educators may be hesitant to use comics in the classroom because of bias about comics' credibility and because teacher training includes verbal "narratives as the only legitimate cultural material worth studying" (Duncan & Smith, 2013, p. 279).

What do comic books have to do with leadership and critical thinking skills? Few studies specifically address how readers use critical thinking when reading comics. Yet, comics may be useful to help address the current problem identified in this study. This study sought to take a specific problem within the educational realm, in this case leadership and critical thinking skills, and understand how comic books could address or possibly improve the concerns. Leadership behaviors have the potential to be more ethical, moral, and efficient for individuals who form their leadership perceptions using a critical thinking process (Flores et al., 2012; Stedman, 2009). Furthermore, employers see higher educational institutions as responsible for teaching critical thinking skills (Casner-Lotto & Benner, 2006). Yet traditional techniques for teaching critical thinking "rarely contribute" to "learning outcomes" (Lizzio & Wilson, 2007, p. 278) and may be ineffective (Barbuto, 2000; Burbach et al., 2004; Lizzio & Wilson, 2007; Paul, 2005). Unfortunately, some studies indicated that undergraduate students cannot effectively use critical thinking and graduate deficient in critical thinking ability (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004; Flores, et al., 2012; Paul, 2005). As a result, more research is needed to understand how critical thinking can be applied to leadership teaching (Jenkins & Cutchens, 2011).

How comics might address or improve critical thinking and leadership is not well known, but comics offer specific traits that may be of use for educators who want to address leadership and critical thinking concerns. For example, fiction is seen as being beneficial for leadership learning (Fraiberg, 2010; Badarraco, 2006); and the comics medium is theorized to improve reader critical

thinking (Rapp, 2011). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of critical thinking in reader perceptions of leadership in comics and to make recommendations for the use of comics in the classroom for critical thinking improvement and engagement. Qualitative interviews with readers of *The Walking Dead* were conducted using grounded theory to determine the process readers use to perceive leadership in *The Walking Dead*. Semistructured interviews were analyzed for the presence of critical thinking using Facione et al.'s (1995) definition of critical thinking dispositions. Data were collected through an online survey and email interviews with participants.

The use of critical thinking to perceive leadership had a duel purpose in this study. First, research suggests that leadership and critical thinking are needed, yet lacking, skills in college graduates. Thus, the researcher could explore how comics may be useful for both of these deficient skills. Second, and more importantly, when exploring critical thinking in participants, the researcher needed each participant to address the same phenomenon. In this case, the application of a critical thinking process was used to perceive leadership, which aided in consistent rating of critical thinking because each participant was discussing leadership in his or her interview responses.

Comics in the Classroom for Critical Thinking: A Review and Rationale

Comics might not be the first avenue people think of when considering ways to improve critical thinking for the purpose of leadership learning for college students. Ndalianis (2011) explained that in the 1950s, before popularization of comics as adult literature, comics were criticized for their adult content that corrupted youth culture. However, as American culture became more embracive of violence and sex in television, film, and video games, the content of comics became acceptable (Ndalianis, 2011). Yet, despite these changes in the comics industry, incorporating comics fully into the education world seems to be slow, most likely based on its perception of being a low form of popular culture media (Duncan & Smith, 2013; Ndalianis, 2011).

Many educators across all levels are increasingly recognizing the value of comics and other sequential art in the classroom. At the collegiate level, Short, Randolph-Seng, and Mckenny (2013) found that a graphic text approach, as opposed to a traditional textbook, encouraged readers to engage in a storyline, assess the situation, and update their evaluations all while considering content. Gavigan (2010) found that graphic novel reading for a group of academically struggling eighth grade students increased their motivation to read. Dallacqua (2012) studied a group of fifth grade students and concluded that visual information from the graphic novels strengthened the students' understanding of literary devices such as point of view, themes, symbolism, allusions, morals, tone and mood, flashback, and foreshadowing. Cary (2004) stated that comics are useful in the multilingual classroom because beginning second language learners

rely on the visuals to help comprehend the story. Comics help readers increase logical predictions, or inference abilities, while reading because of the visual support. Visual support aids in comprehension, which eases prediction (Cary, 2004). The non-profit organization Reading With Pictures (2014), founded in 2009, seeks to "promote literacy and improve educational outcomes for all students" with the use of comic books in the classroom. Comic Books Classroom, a Colorado based non-profit organization, provides free comic book curriculum to help improve literacy, art skills, student achievement, and personal awareness. Comicsclassroom, a Wikispace site, offers numerous resources and educational material for individuals interested in the use of comics for learning purposes.

The growing use of comics in education helps to form a foundation of why comics might be considered for critical thinking improvement. However, it is also important to understand how literature and storytelling affect critical thinking specifically for leadership perceptions. Sidney (1583/2009) considered poetry (or literature) as a social function that, with its emotional appeal, caused praxis rather than gnosis. Poetry, Sidney theorized, "was more successful than other disciplines, especially history and philosophy, in leading man to virtue" (Kinney, 1988, pp. 50–51). The ability of literature to lead to leadership awareness, as a virtue, is discussed by Badaracco (2006), who determined that fiction can serve as case studies to enable learners to raise critical questions in personal terms. Badaracco concluded that raising critical questions enables business executives to reflect on themselves as leaders. He argued that fiction can be treated as case studies and examined in depth as a means to learn about oneself and leadership. In addition, Fraiberg (2010) suggested that fiction adds to leadership development through its ability to embrace the impossible and to confront the idea that not all problems end with an answer.

Comics involve reader critical thinking because of the sequential visual and verbal nature of the medium. May (2012) called this phenomenon "engaging and powerful because [the reader has] invested [his or her] own intelligence and imagination and emotion" (para. 18). McCloud (1993) stated that comics are a medium that makes the audience a "willing and conscious collaborator," which differs from other media because the reader mentally constructs the story presented in a comic book's panels and gutters (p. 65). Readers are forced to find "meaning and resonance" between the juxtaposed panels (McCloud, 1993, p. 73). Furthermore, Cohn (2012) stated that readers not only infer between panels but also within the panels. For example, comics writers and illustrators might create a panel with a star containing the word "Pow" inside of it to signify the action of a hit or punch. Readers do not see the hit occur but they infer meaning based on the visual and verbal information presented within the panel (Cohn, 2012). Therefore, comics, as a sequential verbal and visual form, involve the reader differently than verbal-only texts. Beyond just the delivery of comics, Rapp (2011) stated that

reader interaction between a comics adaption and the same story in other media (film or literature) encourages readers to review multiple sources on a topic, an important step in any research or methodology process.

Rethinking Critical Thinking Pedagogy

The educational properties of comics present several advantageous qualities for perceiving, and perhaps improving, critical thinking. These advantages may be useful for considering current techniques in addressing critical thinking in higher education, which many scholars believe is ineffective at producing good critical thinkers (Barbuto, 2000; Burbach et al., 2004; Lizzio & Wilson, 2007; Paul, 2005). Flores et al. (2012) explained traditional critical thinking teaching as a method of focusing on memorization and an increased knowledge base; whereas methods that are more fitting to a 21st century society should focus on perspectives and objective possibilities. Peters (2007) suggested a similar criticism that traditional instruction rarely leads to critical thinking but is instead a "learning how to learn" ideal that does not focus on both style *and* kinds of thinking and reasoning (p. 352). Flores et al. (2012) suggested the educational system needs to re-evaluate current critical thinking curricula to engage students emotionally. Therefore, they recommended that critical thinking teaching should be implemented in courses outside of just critical-thinking-specific courses. Flores et al. suggested that critical thinking learning may need to include a communal ideal, where learning and teaching is implied as a "collective phenomenon," not an individual process (p. 226). Critical thinking teaching approaches that consider communal and collective processes may be more fitting to the multimodal forms of communication that are present in the lives of students in the 21st century.

The National Educational Association considers critical thinking as one of the "Four Cs" in preparing students for the 21st century, placing importance on technology and student ability to learn in a meaningful context. Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) state that educators should consider literacy that is present in the lives of students, including multimodal literacy. The use of multimodal texts helps address the New Literacy Studies theoretical framework, which views literacy "as a range of social practices affected by social factors" (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila, 2006, p. 42). Karchmer-Klein and Harlow Shinas (2012) stated that a problem with teaching multimodal texts is understanding how to place them in the K-12 environment; regardless, they stated, "In a multimodal text or space, modes cannot be interpreted individually, but, rather they must read a connected unit" (p. 61). Kress (2010) defined multimodality as a combination of words and images. Comics, as a combination of words and images that must be read as unit, are a multimodal form of reading. However, student critical thinking levels cannot be completely determined by pedagogy and instruction. For example, Arum and Roska (2010) followed 2,322 college students and determined that students spend more time socializing or in extracurricular activities than

pursuing academics. Thus, although improvement in critical thinking may be needed, the cause of low critical thinking in students cannot be attributed to solely inefficient pedagogy and teaching. Yet, at the least, a consideration of methods that use comics may help address the need to include multimodal communication forms. As Yang (2008) discussed, comics bridge the gap between the media students watch and the media they read. In addition, Duncan and Smith (2013) stated that the increase in comics use in academics addresses the need to teach different literacies that correspond with the multimodal culture of today's world, a culture that uses "textual, visual, and aural stimuli simultaneously to communicate its message" (p. 279).

Definitions

Facione et al.'s (1995) comprehensive model based on seven critical thinking dispositions was used to analyze participant responses for critical thinking. Facione et al. concluded that critical thinking is achieved when linking six critical thinking skills to the seven dispositions. Facione et al.'s critical thinking model was used to define critical thinking throughout this study. This study used Facione et al.'s dispositions when analyzing data because critical thinking skills "and dispositions are mutually reinforced" and "a strong overall disposition toward [critical thinking] is integral to insuring the use of [critical thinking] skills outside the narrow instructional setting" (Facione et al., 1995, p. 3). This study sought to understand how the use of critical thinking when perceiving leadership in comics might transfer to the use of critical thinking in areas of life that transcend comics; therefore, analyzing the dispositions, rather than the skills, allowed for a broader understanding of critical thinking outside the narrow setting of the study.

The distinction of comics-specific terms is also important for this study. The term graphic novel is increasingly used to refer to comic books, particularly comic books seeking to distance themselves from the juvenile history and misrepresentation of the genre (Duncan & Smith, 2013). Typically, the term comic book is used for an on-going, monthly or periodically published 20–25-page issue. Graphic novels are, in essence, still comic books, although the term is often used for a limited series or story arc collected in one large book. For instance, *The Walking Dead* is published in monthly pamphlets and in volumes that collect multiple monthly issues. The appearance of these volumes physically resembles the more traditional form of the novel, and major bookstores often refer to their comic books section as the *graphic novels* section, even referring to nonfiction comics and scholarly studies of comics as graphic novels. However, as a monthly publication, *The Walking Dead* is a trade paperback. These monthly trade paperbacks are collected in editions, but the original form of the publication is month-to-month, which is distinguishable from a typical graphic novel that is one long-form story. Thus, despite the fact that graphic novels and comic books

have become interchangeable terms, there are differences in the publication type. For clarity, this study used the term *comics* and *sequential art* to refer to the medium. *Comic books* refer to monthly issued comics, including trade paperbacks, and *graphic novels* refers to story arcs collected in one volume.

Leadership in *The Walking Dead* comics

In addition to having clear issues of leadership, *The Walking Dead* illustrates three aspects needed to conduct a study on the use of critical thinking when perceiving leadership: (a) the advantages of narrative fiction; (b) the visual and verbal delivery of a story; and (c) the entertainment advantages of popular culture comics, all of which are important when considered critical thinking teaching methods that interact with a multimodal format. *The Walking Dead* was, at the time of this research, a current popular comic book with a current popular television adaptation; as a result, readers may interact with social discussions of the storyline in addition to their personal reading and reactions. In addition, the popular nature of *The Walking Dead* makes the readers not only representative of comic book readers, but also of popular culture entertainment. When looking at how comics can be used in the college classroom, it is important to understand their relevance to students' lives and interests. Furthermore, the large readership of *The Walking Dead* increased the chances of receiving the ideal 20–30 participants for interviewing and increased the odds of receiving participants who did not read comics other than *The Walking Dead.*

The Walking Dead story and plot provided leadership issues needed for a study researching leadership perspectives. *The Walking Dead* is about a group of zombie apocalypse survivors who discover that life is about more than just surviving day to day; it is also about keeping family and loved ones as safe as possible when balancing social dynamics. The comics' characters learn to live in a world filled with deadly zombies; however, throughout the series, they learn that new, complicated issues of group behavior and survival outrank the zombies in terms of danger.

In extreme situations (like a zombie apocalypse) social norms do not apply because the situation has never occurred previously. There are no "standards of behavior that are shared" in group situations that have never been experienced (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 116). Extreme circumstances confuse roles in identity, perception, exceptions, and conflict (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Roles are "expected behavior patterns" but the characters do not have past experiences with a zombie apocalypse; therefore, there is no pattern to reflect upon. When patterns of expected behavior do not exist already, groups must reform and relearn the five-stage model of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Thus, behavior continues to evolve in a group situation.

The evolution of behavior that contradicts established personality, values, and morals, is portrayed, for example, in Issue #17 of *The Walking Dead* when

Rick, the story's protagonist, decides to hang Thomas after discovering he murdered Rachel and Susie Greene. Rick declares the rule, "You Kill. You Die" to the group. However, in Issue #24, Rick realizes that the world has changed and rescue is not coming. He recognizes that change is needed and rules need to evolve to their surroundings. Rick changes his rules and tells the group, "You Kill. You Live." Rick, in Issue #24, determines the group must adapt to survive. He declared, "I will do whatever I have to do to keep us safe. Whatever it is—I will do it."

When leaders do not have the ability to pick members of fellowship, but rather simply get what they come across, the group becomes "a product of circumstance more than design" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 21). Rick Grimes sweats the stock qualities of leadership: aggressiveness, physical stamina, decisiveness, charisma, and loyalty. His confidence in making decisions and acting personally on them attracted other survivors to follow him. The group then simply becomes the "survivors," their commonality being they are alive. All other past social identities are erased because the most important of all human qualities is that of being alive; everything else is simply a result of life. Rick often puts himself in harm's way for the betterment of the group, which, despite negative qualities, offers a better choice in comparison to other leader characters. For example, in Issue #118, Maggie, a long-time member of Rick's group, approached a group of survivors and said, "If you follow Gregory's lead…you'll be beholden to [Negan] forever!" Words such as lead, leader, and follow are often used in *The Walking Dead*.

A brief review of the group dynamics and leadership in *The Walking Dead* is important when considering the educational properties of reading fiction. Johnson (2011) stated that fictional leaders can teach readers about leadership. The characters of *The Walking Dead* can serve as moral exemplars as readers evaluate actions of the characters for ethical behavior and decision making ability. As a result, the leadership decisions from the comics offer readers exemplars for leadership learning within fictional context.

Methodology and Design

Before implementing comic books into the classroom for the purpose of engaging critical thinking when perceiving leadership, the researcher first needed to explore how, or if, comic book readers use critical thinking to perceive leadership. Creswell (2013) stated that a qualitative design allows a researcher to focus on participant views rather than perceived notions of the researcher. A grounded theory study was selected because of the study's intent to "move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). In addition, grounded theory studies seek to form a theory about an action or process on a research problem that does not have a current theory or explanation (Creswell, 2013). This study sought to form a theory about how readers perceive

leadership in *The Walking Dead* and to understand the role of critical thinking in those perceptions. Currently, there are few, if any, theories to explain this process for any comic book. Conclusions from grounded theory studies can be used in future studies, and this study sought to make potential recommendations for using comic books in the classroom to improve student critical thinking when perceiving leadership.

First, the study used an online survey to hook participants into email interviews. Two open-ended questions, "How do you value comic books for learning experiences?" and "What is a specific example of leadership in *The Walking Dead*?" provided a base for understanding how readers value comics for learning experiences and what leadership examples they determined in the comic books. The survey worked as a "hook" because survey participants were asked to include an email address if they were interested in participating in email interviews. Thus, the interview participants were all first survey participants.

Invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to a comics scholars listserv and 56 comic book retailers across the United States. In addition, the researcher created a Twitter account and actively invited individuals who were discussing *The Walking Dead* comic books. The survey invitation was posted on three different Facebook *The Walking Dead* comic fan groups, and on several open posts on *The Walking Dead* and *Skybound* Facebook pages. The survey invitation was also shared on three different website forums discussing *The Walking Dead.*

After reviewing the online surveys, the researcher started email interviews. The following questions served as the three structured questions of the email interviews:

(1) What is your process for determining leadership in *The Walking Dead*? Please be as specific as possible.

(2) How does the visual and verbal delivery of comic books affect your ability to perceive leadership within *The Walking Dead*? Please be as specific as possible.

(3) What are other issues, thoughts, or ideas that you would like to mention concerning your perceptions of leadership within comic books?

The structured email interview questions served as the main contributor for the grounded theory analysis of participant processes for perceiving leadership and the role of critical thinking in these perceptions. However, because the study used semistructured qualitative interviewing, additional questions were asked based on participant online survey responses and additional information offered in subsequent email correspondence. For example, the online survey asked participants about experience and education in (a) comics studies, (b) leadership studies, and (c) critical thinking studies. Thus, additional interview questions were asked to explore more about these experiences and education. All interviews used

in analysis included participant responses to the structured email interview questions; however, each interview was different depending on the participant responses.

An online, email interview process using structured questions kept the researcher in the background while still interacting with the participants in an individualized manner based on their responses. Semistructured interviewing allowed the researcher to avoid leading participants into responses about their critical thinking process while still maintaining a structure to analyze responses with a Straussian grounded theory approach. Jones and Alony (2011) stated that Straussian grounded theory, as opposed to Glaserian grounded theory, uses structure to lead to a "more forced emergence of a theory" (p. 99), which is why the researcher chose to analyze data using a preconceived notion of critical thinking based on Facione et al.'s (1995) critical thinking dispositions. Using email interviews to collect data, rather than face-to-face interviews or focus groups, allowed the researcher to practice bracketing. The researcher wanted to bracket personal bias of using comics to perceive leadership, and the email interviews allowed for a semistructured environment for interviewing that focused on structured questions and the responses of the participants. Furthermore, the online survey and emailed interviews employed one of three Internet-based qualitative researcher methods described by Meho (2006). The asynchronous interview method was chosen over the synchronous method because interviews were not collected from participants in a group setting or at the same time. The appeal of an online survey and email interviews was that it allowed participants to respond to questions at their own pace without influence from other participant responses.

Data Analysis: Online Survey

The online survey collected responses from 177 participants; 69 of those participants provided acceptable short answers to the two open-ended survey questions. Males accounted for 58 (84%) of participants, 32 (43%) of total participants were 19–29 years old, 23 (33%) were 30–39 years old, 8 (11%) were 40–49 years old, and 5 (7%) were 50 years or older. A majority of participants (74%) considered themselves comic book readers; however, only 26% of participants indicated they had experience and/or education in comics studies. A slight majority of participants (55%) indicated they had education and/or experience in critical thinking studies, and 35% indicated they had experience or education in leadership studies.

The researcher first analyzed participant responses to the question "How do you value comics for learning experiences? Please be as specific as possible." The majority of participants (85%) indicated a value of comics for learning experiences as listed in Table 1; these categories were then analyzed and placed into themes based on Bloom's (1956) three domains for learning: cognitive,

affective, and psychomotor. For the purpose of assigning themes to the categories, cognitive learning was defined as intellectual abilities and skills (Bloom, 1956); affective learning was defined as the development of attitudes and behavior, rather than intellectual ability (Rovai, Wighting, Baker, & Grooms, 2008) and the presence of motivation to learn (Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996); and psychomotor learning was defined as the manual tasks and movements of the body (Rovai et al., 2008). The placement of the categories into these themes helped to determine the possible use of comics in the classroom, which was an underlining purpose of the study. Categories of the values of comics for learning experiences were placed in one of the three domains of learning. Table 1 lists the categories, the number of times the category was mentioned by participants, and the domain of learning determined from each category. The researcher practiced co-occurring coding because many participants (n = 26) listed more than one category. Two participants were confused by the question, one participant did not respond, and two participants stated the value "depends."

Table 1
Online Participants' Value of Comics as a Learning Experience

Value of Comics as a Learning Experience	Times Mentioned	Learning Theme
Teaching life lessons	28	Affective
Cognitive abilities	14	Cognitive
Learning to read/Reading motivation	13	Affective
Entertainment	12	Affective
Involving imagination	10	Cognitive
Same value as all other literature	7	N/A
Visual literacy	6	Cognitive
Inconclusive reason, but valued	6	N/A
Not valued	5	None
Art appreciation	3	Affective
Learning vocabulary	3	Cognitive
Inconclusive reason: depends on the reader and comic	2	N/A
Inconclusive: confused by the question	2	N/A
No response	1	N/A

The second open-ended survey question asked participants to list a specific example of leadership in *The Walking Dead* and explain why they see this as leadership. Again, 69 represented the total number of participant responses analyzed. The eight most frequently mentioned categories are listed in Table 2 along with the number of times each category was mentioned in association with Rick, the most frequently mentioned leadership character.

Table 2
Qualities of Leadership in The Walking Dead

Quality of Leadership	Frequently of the Quality as Mentioned in Participant Responses	Number of Times Quality Mentioned in Association with Rick
Protecting others	30	22
Making decisions	23	20
Totalitarian/Authoritative	12	4
Taking control	10	9
Motivating/Inspiring	9	9
Fallible/Imperfect	8	8
Accepting responsibilities/consequences	7	6
Reluctant/Unconfident	6	6

Data Analysis: Email Interviews

Twenty-two survey participants also participated in email interviews. A majority of the participants were males (n = 20) and had some college education: graduate degree (n = 8), bachelor's degree (n = 6), and some college (n = 6). Most participants had experience and/or education with critical thinking (n = 14), and slightly above half (n = 12) had comics studies education/experience. Few participants indicated education and/or experience in leadership studies (n = 6). Only one participant indicated he did not consider himself a comic book reader.
Perceptions of leadership for email participants were similar to perceptions determined from survey participants, although the most frequently listed leadership qualities were different. Email participants most frequently listed the individual who (a) makes decisions, (b) is imperfect/fallible, (c) takes control, and (c) protects others.

Using the process of memoing, the researcher reviewed interviews to look for issues that contributed to participant perceptions of leadership. The central

theme in the participant process to perceive leadership was determining character attributes that embodied leadership in their opinions. In short, in explaining their process for determining leadership in *The Walking Dead*, participants first determined who is leading then explained leadership qualities of the leader and/or leaders. The who is leading theme was mentioned in all participant interviews and inferred to be the primary influence for 19 of the 22 participants. Other themes were influential, but not universally central. Thus, the key theme in perceiving leadership for the participants was to first simply look at qualities of the characters that they considered being leadership qualities.

The researcher then determined what factors influenced the leadership qualities the participants determined. After establishing this central theme, the researcher used three-phrase coding, which determines themes and issues and their relationship to each other. Overall, many potential causal factors may exist, but were not identified by participants in interviews. Figure 1 placed the themes in proximately to the central theme (who is leading) based on their weight of influence. Table 3 shows examples of participant responses that were associated with the seven themes.

Figure 1. Perceiving leadership in comics theoretical model

Table 3
Seven Influences of Reader Perceptions of Leadership

Themes	Sample of Participant Responses
Identifying who is leading	·"Who the other characters willingly follow." · "Making leadership decisions at the times they need to be made."
Visual/Verbal comics delivery (a) Dialogue combined with visuals (b) Visual focus (c) Verbal focus	(a) ·"[Leadership] is sort of who has the most screen time and words…Rick is on the page way more often than any other characters, and when there's long exposition, it's Rick." (b) ·Because of the "black and white" delivery "the reader focuses more on the interactions of the characters, and therefore, the leadership of Rick and others." (c) ·"[Rick's] word balloons are always more exaggerating and highlighted when he is 'leading.'"
Storytelling, noncomics specific (a) Survival storyline (b) Non-visual, noncomic storytelling (c) A focus on certain characters (main characters/focal characters in the story) (d) A story featuring good versus bad characters	(a) · "[Leadership] is about survival. The actions of the leader keep the group, the majority of the group, alive." (b) ·"Storytelling is storytelling…holds your attention and keeps you coming back, good art, ugly art, no art…whatever." (c) ·"We believe Rick is the strongest leader only because we have the most experience with him…" (d) · "[A] hero has a villain, and with that comes decisions to be made."
Critical thinking experience/education	· "Allows me to see the characters in a different light."
Comics studies experience/education	· "Being a comics scholar has provided me insight into how the medium (of comics) allows conveyance of meaning beyond the written word."
Leadership experience/education	· "I do think my experiences help me to see leaders more clearly in any situation including [The Walking Dead]. I've seen every form of leadership from fear based to the more lenient and gentle type."
Real life decisions/ comparisons	· "I often find myself comparing myself to the characters or even what I would do in the situation."

Once establishing the interactions and influences of participant perceptions of leadership in *The Walking Dead* using grounded theory research, interviews were analyzed for the role of critical thinking. Interviews were reviewed again and coded for each of the seven critical thinking dispositions as determined by Facione et al.'s (1995). After reviewing for the presence of the seven dispositions, the participants were coded using ratings of their dispositions as strong, acceptable, or weak. A rubric of the ratings and the corresponding dispositions (Table 4) was used to rate the participants' dispositions consistently.

Table 4
Measuring Critical Thinking Disposition Rubric

	Strong	Acceptable	Weak
Systematic	Participant stated they **had a means** (not necessarily a process) to identify leadership and directly **explained it and its relevance** to their leadership perceptions.	Participant stated they **had a means** to identify leadership **but did not connect or explain** this means to their perceptions of leadership.	Participant **did not directly state their means** to identify leadership, but simply stated examples of leadership or defined leadership
Analytical	Participant **described leadership in specific, complex terms**, i.e. giving examples of action(s), and describing the context of the leadership in the action(s).	Participant **described leadership in basic terms**, giving basic examples and description of context and/or action(s).	**Participant did not describe** leadership or describe examples of context and/action.
Inquisitive	The participant **exhibited excitement** to discuss leadership in the comic and **extended the conversation** by offering additional insights beyond the posed interview questions. Participant also specifically indicated that comics are valued for learning experiences.	Participant **exhibited excitement** and extended the discussion about leadership in a **minimal** fashion. Participant valued comics as a learning experience, but not specifically.	Participant **did not extend the conversation** about leadership in the comic but rather simply and nonspecifically answered the questions. Participant did not value comics as a learning experience.
Judicious	Participant **drew conclusions** about the leadership of the character(s) by clearly comparing to real life leaders, other comics, or other leaders within the comic book by **showing extensive evidence, context, and standards.**	Participant **drew conclusions** about the leadership of the characters with **minimal comparison** to real life leaders or other characters within the comics. Participant showed **minimal evidence, context, and standards.**	Participant **did not consider more than one option of leadership** and **did not compare leadership** of the characters or to real life leaders with evidence, context, or standards.
Truthseeking	Participant was **objective** about leadership examples and definitions and	Participant was **minimally objective** about leadership examples and	Participant was **not objective** about leadership examples and definitions and

	showed evaluation of multiple leadership styles.	definition and showed a **minimal amount of evaluations** of multiple leadership styles.	**did not show evaluation** of multiple leadership styles.
Confidence in Reasoning	Participant **clearly and specifically explained** how their perceptions of leadership exemplified leadership; for example, "This is leadership because…" or "Leadership is…" or "I define leadership as…"	Participant **explained** how their perceptions of leadership exemplified leadership, **but not specifically**.	Participant **did not explain** how their perceptions of leadership exemplified leadership.
Open-minded	Participant **showed potential bias** about perceptions of leadership as influenced by the story's content or personal preference, such as admitting successful leadership depends on the context and strengths of the leader, or that leadership perceptions are in part influenced by the writer/artist.	Participant **inferred potential bias** about perceptions of leadership, but **did not directly explain** how the story's content, personal experiences, or the writer/artist may have influenced perceptions of leadership.	Participant **did not show or discuss any potential for bias** in their leadership perceptions.

After rating each disposition for each participant, the ratings were reviewed and compared to ensure continuity of the assigned ratings. The researcher then made a chart of sample participant responses for the strong rating for all seven dispositions (Table 5). Interviews were reviewed again to check for consistency in the ratings. The sample statements offered a foundation to ensure consistency in rating, but participant ratings were not solely made based on single statements, but multiple statements throughout the interview that related to the seven disposition areas. The sample of responses in Table 5 offered a small snapshot of participant exemplification in each area, but these statements did not represent the sole existence of the disposition within responses. Although participants did not have a process for perceiving leadership, the systematic disposition was rated based on participant clarity in explaining how they determined leadership. For instance, a participant who was rated as "strong," stated, "I wouldn't say that I have an overt method of determining leadership...rather...I use a heuristic or schema of what a leader is or how a leader should act and compare a given character to that leadership heuristic or schema." Although there was not a process, the participant directly stated how he identifies leadership.

Table 5
Sample Participant Responses for "Strong" Disposition Ratings

Systematic	• "I wouldn't say that I have an overt method of determining leadership…rather, I would say that I use a heuristic or schema of what a leader is or how a leader should act and compare a given character to that leadership heuristic or schema."
Analytical	• "Rick is striving to be a leader of a community/team instead of a group…groups and teams provide a basis for family, protection, waging war, government, and work…Rick has seen that Negan can destroy all the work the communities have put into their survival."
Inquisitive	•"[M]aybe the better questions to ask would be 'What process do the characters in the comics take to determine leadership?' In the comic I feel Rick takes on the leadership role given that he was law enforcement prior to the apocalypse.
Judicious	• "The better writing [in today's comics] has lead to much better characters and, therefore, better leaders. It is no longer just enough to beat up the main villain but show the decision making that the leaders must go through in order to defeat the villains and it is not always by using their fist."
Truthseeking	• "Leadership is a complex psychological construct and comic books have a tendency to simplify it into a pep talk, theme, or first punch. Robert Kirkman (the writer) wants us to believe that Rick is just a natural leader, but I believe that a better example of true leadership is from the character that only actively seeks it out, but also activity hold it."
Confidence in Reasoning	• "I define leadership in the comics as a large number of people, more than four, using a single or group thinking to remain alive. Leadership is the comic isn't about advancement, it's about survival. The actions of the leader keep the group, the majority of the group, alive."
Open-minded	• "[Rick] being the leader is kind of a thing of convenience from a writing standpoint on Kirkman (the writer)…we see the comic through Rick as the actor with complete agency that occasionally falters to keep the narrative interesting."

After coding participant interviews for disposition ratings, the researcher reviewed the length of each interview to determine whether interview response length correlated with ratings. The email interviewing depended on participants responding to subsequent questions from the researcher. The researcher wanted to ensure that the ratings of the dispositions were not highly influenced simply by the length of response (i.e., participants may have a greater disposition but because of the short responses or lack of participation, this disposition was not evident). A trend existed between the length of the interview and the average disposition score, but there was no significance to the relationship ($r = .542$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$). This suggests that the scores were not highly influenced by the amount of the words used in participant response.

The researcher compared information to determine whether education level, comics studies experience/education, leadership experience/education, or critical thinking experience/education correlated with disposition scores. An education setting would not likely have students with extensive education or experience in this areas, so the researcher wanted to determine if these factors affected critical thinking for this study's participants. A trend existed between education level and disposition score, but there was no significance to the relationship ($r = .423$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$). Overall, no relationship existed between disposition scores and critical thinking ($r = .326$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$), leadership ($r = .011$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$), or comics studies ($r = .161$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$) experience/education. Likewise, no relationship existed between participant critical thinking disposition scores and the amount of comic books they read on a monthly basis ($r = .126$, $df = 20$, $p = .360$). Overall, this suggests that a variety of comic readers use critical thinking, regardless of education.

Overall, participants showed critical thinking dispositions, albeit at varying degree. Although participants were aware of the purpose of the study, they were not directly asked about their use of critical thinking. The presence of critical thinking disposition across all participants, regardless of interview length or participant education/experience, suggests that comic book readers use critical thinking when perceiving leadership in comics.

Results and Discussion

This study determined that readers from a variety of educational backgrounds use critical thinking to perceive leadership in comics. In addition, participants, regarding of educational background, find a learning value for comics, and they determine similar leadership even when they have no contact with each other. The results of this study suggest comics can be used in the classroom to engage with reader critical thinking and to identity particular leadership styles. Table 6 addresses four of the key findings and implications determined from this research.

Table 6
Study Findings and Implications Summary

Findings	Implication of Findings
1. Comics readers value comics for learning experiences in a variety of ways, most frequently affective learning. Most frequent specific learning values included teaching life lessons, involving cognitive abilities, and learning to read/reading motivation.	Comics are more than just entertaining pieces of literature. Affective and cognitive learning are perceived advantages. Use of comics in the classroom can interact and perhaps improve student affective and cognitive learning, most specifically issues of life lessons (human behavior, survival, morals), cognitive abilities (critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis), and learning to read/reading motivation.
2. Comics readers from the email interviews most frequently identified leadership in *The Walking Dead* as making decisions, protecting others, taking control, and being imperfect/fallible.	When asked, readers easily determine specific types of leadership in comics. Comics can be useful for leadership understanding. Identifying leadership in comics characters may help improve the ability of students to perceive and identify good or bad leadership in life. In addition, this study implies that the use fiction as leadership case studies should not be limited to only verbal fiction.
3. Readers did not have a process for determining leadership, but the central phenomenon for readers was to determine who is leading, which was influenced, in order of importance, by the comics visual/verbal delivery; the noncomics specific storytelling; previous education/experience in critical thinking, leadership studies, and comics studies; and real life decisions/comparisons.	Many influences exist when readers perceive leadership in comics. Comics can serve as practice in how to perceive leadership correctly and advantageously in a student's life. Understanding the influence of perceiving leadership in comics may help students understand the influences of perceiving leadership in life, such as depictions of leaders in the media and how one's own education and knowledge influences leadership perceptions.
4. Readers determine perceptions of leadership in comics using critical thinking.	Comics interact with reader critical thinking, even when readers aren't directly asked to consider critical thinking. Reading comics may improve student ability to use the critical thinking process outside of reading comics, perhaps most notably when perceiving leadership. Using comics in the classroom may help improve deficient critical thinking skills in college students while also exploring new methods of teaching critical thinking that some researchers consider to be insufficient.

Educators interested in using comics in their classrooms could conduct additional research to see if the findings apply to their students, particularly to students who might not typically read comics. The participants of this study were comic books readers, and more research would need to be conducted to determine if non-comic book readers use similar critical thinking when perceiving leadership in comics. This study was not able to determine whether the role of critical thinking in perceiving leadership in comics would be different than the role of critical thinking when perceiving leadership in verbal-only fiction. The type of leadership in *The Walking Dead* would not be the same for all other comics; thus, influences to perceive leadership may not be the same while reading other comics. In addition, the semistructured interview questions may have lead participants into responses. Future studies would need to repeat this research in a classroom environment to determine if similar results would occur after reading other comics. Furthermore, a less structured interview process could be used to understand how the process and use of critical thinking may differ for different readers reading different comics.

A suggestion would be to have students read verbal-only fiction and a comics story to compare critical thinking scores. For example, *The Walking Dead* comics could be paired with a verbal-only story of a similar genre and content, perhaps Cormac McCarthy's (2006) *The Road*. Educators would need to consider appropriate content for the educational level; *The Walking Dead* might not be well suited for a high school environment. In addition to critical thinking involvement, comics could also be used for leadership understanding. Because this study determined readers identify similar leadership styles (regardless of not having contact with each other), educators teaching leadership could choose comics as a mean to discuss leadership. For example, Johnson's (2011) definition for the leadership style of utilitarianism is "attempting to do the greatest good for the great number of people," in which, at times, doing the greatest good can be confused with personal, selfish interest (pp. 154-156). An example of the ethical perspective of utilitarianism can be found in the character Ozymandias, from Moore and Gibbon's (1986–1987/2005) graphic novel *Watchmen*, who staged a major disaster that killed millions in order to force world peace, and, in his view, saving humanity from nuclear war. The graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (1988–1989/2005) depicted an anarchist committing terrorist actions against a government that is lying to its people, preventing basic human rights, and covering up genocide. A reader of this graphic novel can view the leadership tactic of the protagonist, called "V," as having a Kantian categorical imperative: the need to do what he feels is right no matter the consequence.

Conclusion

This study sought to contribute to research on the growing use of comics and sequential art in education. Specifically, the study hoped to determine the role

of critical thinking in reader perceptions of leadership in comics. Despite the presence of comics in academics and popular culture, study of their potential use in the field of leadership and critical thinking is minimal. However, theories indicate that comic books and other graphic narratives involve a reader's critical thinking process (McCloud, 1993; Rapp, 2011); furthermore, fiction is theorized to advantageously serve as case studies that involve leadership awareness (Badaracco, 2006; Fraiberg, 2010). The results suggest that a variety of readers value comics for learning experiences and are able to perceive leadership using critical thinking. The results of this study were concluded through the use of qualitative research using an online survey and email interviews. A grounded theory approach was used to determine a theory of how readers perceive leadership, and the level of critical thinking dispositions was analyzed using Facione et al.'s (1995) definition of seven disposition terms. Overall, the results of this study indicate that comics engage reader critical thinking and the have potential to be useful tools in an educational setting.

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Grids and Gestures: A Comics Making Exercise

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Grids and Gestures: A Comics Making Exercise

Nick Sousanis

This is an exercise I developed for the graduate education course on comics that I taught at Teachers College, Columbia University and have subsequently been using for public talks I have done with audiences of academics, educators, and college and high school students. Since most of my students and audiences typically self-describe as non-artists, I wanted something that explored the process of making comics, but did not require established drawing skills – anyone could do it and quickly. While comics activities involving pre-defined templates certainly have their merits, I find for my preferences that they do not get at the deeper issues involved in laying out a comics page and the significant role composition plays in conveying narrative. Instead of putting the emphasis solely on the drawing within the panels, I wanted to give participants a real taste of a comics maker's decision-making process, which as Thierry Groensteen (2007) points out, begins with considerations of the entire page as a whole spatial unit first and foremost (p. 21). As well, it was essential to me that this activity would be engaging and provide a meaningful outlet for individual expression. People needed to be invested personally in the activity. In doing Grids and Gestures with numerous groups over the last several years, I have found that it has served as a way for novices to find their way into making comics and opened new outlets for organizing their thoughts.

I have written this with the teacher/facilitator in mind – not to provide a lesson plan per se, but as an orientation to thinking in comics (at least from my perspective) and to provide reference points for potential facilitators to draw on for their own implementation. Therefore, I want to begin with some conceptual grounding. Scott McCloud (1993), building off Will Eisner's (1985) terminology, defines comics as, "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" (p. 9). The reader stitches together and gives meaning to the sequence of static elements the author has assembled. This is time as a linear experience – a chain of events, one following directly after another. But, because comics are a visual medium, we cannot help but see the entire page and all of its separate elements all at once (Alaniz, 2003, p. 146). We thus make connections not just from one panel to the next, but across the page and back and forth, in all directions. Meaning, as Groensteen puts it, is braided together from all the assembled interconnected elements on the page – making comics a sort of directed network (p. 146). We can think about time too as being experienced simultaneously, for even as we are focused on our immediate activity, in our thoughts we reflect on past events and anticipate future happenings. It all occurs at once. The comics page allows for this conflation of multiple moments in time within its space. Time, in this static medium, is necessarily encoded in space. (See Bernard and Carter (2004) for a rich exploration of this "fourth-dimensional" view in comics.) The interplay of sequential reading and simultaneous viewing modes in a single form imbues comics with a unique dual nature (Sousanis, 2015, p. 62-3), one untethered from strictly linear narrative possibilities.

Thus, while comics often get compared to storyboarding, because of this interplay of sequential and simultaneous modes, they in fact operate in different fashion altogether. In comics, not only are we concerned with what goes on in each frame or panel, but we also need to attend to the size and shape of individual panels, their orientation, and their placement within the overall composition and relationship to other elements of the page (Miller, 2007, p. 83). Additionally, we might also find intentional use of empty space as well as elements in the liminal space between panels and across panels. Furthermore, even the notion of the discrete element called a "panel," while fairly commonplace, is hardly a requirement. The kind of border it is bounded by or the absence of a border altogether carries significance. Art Spiegelman refers to the comics page as an "architectonic" unit (Witek, 2007, p. 176-7), which speaks to an overlap between comics and

architecture. We might think of comics page as blueprint. The way in which we arrange the page and orient the reader's movement through it are essential to how comics convey meaning. Terrific examples of the connections between comics and architecture can be found prominently in the work of cartoonist Chris Ware (Ball & Kuhlman, 2010).

In order to get wheels turning about page structure, especially when working with participants with little to no experience with the comics form, I recommend that a facilitator gather a variety of comics pages showcasing vastly different compositional approaches, and if possible, create some examples with the interior contents removed leaving only the panel borders (and perhaps word balloon/text box borders) to isolate the role of composition on storytelling. I share here some content-removed samples that I use frequently: a classic Winsor McCay *Little Nemo* page where his bed grows and grows and walks around the city – wherein even with the panel content whited out, we can see how the very structure grows before returning to normal at the final panel; in the two examples from Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, we see a grid with a steady rhythm like a heartbeat or metronome and another that opens up and is fractured throughout; Frank Quitely's composition from *WE3* has an overlapping, frenetic nature – influenced perhaps by things like "bullet time" from the Matrix and video games. The page structure in each contributes significantly to the meaning within.

Let us pull our attention out from the comics and briefly take in our surroundings. From building exteriors to storm grates to the very way the rooms we inhabit are broken up by windows, blinds, fixtures, and other elements, this geometry of our built environment can serve as material to inspire ways in which we organize a comics page. Look at the arrangement of tiles and other features on the ceiling (or wall) and imagine these spaces being translated into music. Perhaps we hear a series of long regular notes, and then the slats of an air vent produce a quick staccato, before moving on to another region with its particular arrangement. Now transfer this thinking about architectural elements back to the layout of a comics page. The elements of the grid placement – size, shape, orientation, etc. all carry meaning, where, as Eisner (1985) wrote, "timing and rhythm are interlocked" (p. 25-37, 30). Comics offer a visual arrangement of time in space.

With all of this in mind, we can now get to the instructions for the exercise. I have split the explanation into two parts, though participants will likely perform both at the same time once they have heard the full concept. The only materials needed are a single sheet of paper – whatever size people have handy will do, and a pen, pencil, or any suitable marking instrument. For the initial step, ask participants to use their drawing implements to carve up the entire surface of this sheet of paper in grid-like fashion to represent "the shape of your day." They should think about organizing the time passages over that day, with its unique rhythms and disjointed moments, across the space of a page. The day one chooses to focus on can be that exact day, a typical day, a particularly eventful day, or some imagined day – though I think it works best if this abstract comic is grounded in one's lived experience. One important note – it is essential to use the *entire* sheet of paper. That is, if drawers want to leave some part of it blank that has to be done with intentionality. Unlike composing in text, where we might get halfway down a page and be finished, the negative space matters and contributes to the entire meaning.

While drawing blank comics grids addressed the issues of composition I was concerned with, I still felt like the exercise as a whole was missing something in terms of narrative content. I wanted people to be able to express more about the stories behind their day and still keep the drawing minimal. It so happened as I was coming up with this grid-making concept, I was out for a run and noticed that paint had splashed and spilled across the regular tiled boardwalk patterns beneath my feet. This made me think of my wife's abstract paintings – in which she captured her

motion and emotional activity in a direct splash of paint thrown on a surface. In a similar way, I could see these gestural paint splashes cutting through the regular grid as having the potential to convey narrative. In some sense, this representation of space and movement is comics at their most stripped down level.

So for the second aspect of the exercise, participants are to inhabit the grid of sorts they have drawn on the paper with gestural lines, marks of some sort that run through it to represent their physical or emotional activity within and across those frames of time. I would like to emphasize here to encourage participants to do their best not to draw representational things! Everyone should think instead about the kind of line, mark, or collection of marks that characterize their experience in the various moments marked off in the composition. We want to get at the core of crafting a comics page, how it moves and how it is organized, without being tied to preconceptions of what makes a "good" drawing. Compositional elements and the activity of making lines and marks are the primary focus here.

To summarize the instructions in brief: Take a single sheet of paper and carve it up to represent the shape of your day in grid-like fashion. The day one chooses to focus on can be that exact day, a typical day, a particularly eventful day, or some imagined day. Importantly, it is essential to use the *entire* sheet of paper – for empty space has great significance in comics. Then within this composition you have drawn, inhabit the spaces with gestural lines, collections of marks that run through it that represent your physical or emotional activity within and across those frames of time. Do your best not to draw things!

Discussion

I recommend facilitators allow about 10-15 minutes for drawing. Getting everyone to work quickly is important to prevent worrying about the accuracy of the drawing and heighten focus on the composition and the expressive activity of mark making. When time is up, participants will each share a brief explanation of their page, the reasons behinds the choices they made, what the grid represents, that sort of thing. Alternatively, consider starting by asking people to pair off and share with another person without offering any explanation, and have each partner offer an interpretation first before sharing with everyone. As a group, we want to take note of the different ways each person configures the composition, looking for similarities, overlapping approaches, and exploring the deliberate choices people make to organize their experience. The solutions they came up with to represent time passing in a certain way – say a rapid sequence marked by a series of tall, narrow boxes or some other structure – can serve as a point of comparison across the group, and invite a discussion around McCloud's articulations and other references from comics makers to see how they solved similar issues. In my experience, results for the overall structure tend to be wildly diverse from more regular grids to loosely flowing structures to sometimes even spiraling creations. I have had participants make three-dimensional constructions and modified the plain surface of the sheet of paper in other unexpected ways. Even for those who say, worked in straightforward, rectangular grid fashion, we can see individual distinctions that can all be instructive in terms of thinking about how meaning is constructed on a page.

I am rather reticent to describe the exercise to an audience in too much detail or provide past examples for fear of guiding what the responses look like. The ones I share here are more for the facilitator to picture how the activity *might* go and to better understand how to set it in motion. In my explanations, I want to offer enough grounding so that participants are comfortable to proceed, but retain enough ambiguity so that they go in directions I have not anticipated – and this happens every time! I think the most exciting thing that I have seen is the realization as to

how much they already know about drawing and how working visually in this way opens up ways of thinking and representing their experience that they had not previously considered.

Beyond thinking about layout and composition, a primary takeaway from doing this exercise is to raise new ideas for approaching their own work and fundamentally question what it means to draw. Rudolf Arnheim (1969) wrote, "to see is to see in relation" (p. 54). For every time we look into the world, our eyes are making sense of things through the relationships – how close together two objects are, this in front of that, color contrasting with color, and so on. We cannot help it. Therefore, even the simplest of lines drawn across a surface creates some kind of response in the viewer. At its most basic, drawing is orchestrating relationships on a two-dimensional surface, which we then expand back into more dimensional experience in our thoughts. A simple example: from the very experience of living in the world, we know the difference between a jagged form and a curved one – each suggests different meaning. One hurts, the other we could rest our head upon. One is excited, the other calm. One I describe as "sharp" the other as "gentle." Even for self-professed non-drawers, lived experience tells us how to read marks, drawings, shapes, color, and more. Rather than identifying drawing with a particular sort of draftsmanship, let us instead consider drawing as organizing relationships between assembled elements. From this perspective, drawing becomes something accessible to everyone. I highly recommend Molly Bang's book *Picture This,* in which she looks at constructing the tale of Little Red Riding Hood in cutout colored paper to get at the metaphorical principals of drawing at the fundamental level of organizing metaphorical relationships. This leads to a corollary exercise I often do in conjunction with Grids and Gestures. The prompt is simple: draw a relationship that is significant to you (between you and another person, between two people you know well, between a group of people, between yourself and an institution – whatever participants determine is a relationship worth representing is perfectly appropriate). Use cutout colored paper if possible, but if not pretend as if you are working with cutouts when you are drawing. I find working with scissors can be liberating for students – it is hard to be too fussy and it lends itself to finding the essential qualities of a drawing. (In addition to *Picture This,* Matisse's cutout period offers great inspiration.) It might be as simple as two squares of the same color placed right next to one another or a circle and square sitting far apart. Of course, depending on the nature of the relationship and the imagination of the participant, this can and will produce all sorts of unexpected and insightful representations. While this exercise does not have the narrative movement that the grids exercise has, it similarly gets at how arranging relationships (quite literally) between forms can convey a great deal of meaning and just how much even a non-drawer understands implicitly about drawing. I can see this use of shape and color as metaphorical representation being taken back to comics and being used for more narrative purposes.

To close, I want to propose some additional complementary exercises. If there is time and materials available, doing Grids and Gestures with colored markers or pencils introduces a further multimodal aspect into the work. I think it would be quite generative to perform Grids and Gestures every day for a week or so to serve as a visual diary of sorts. One would see how the compositions have developed (or stayed the same) over that time span and witness the emergence of patterns both in their lives but in their ways of working as well. And finally, what I particularly like about "the shape of your day" as a prompt is that everyone has an example ready at hand and it offers a different outlook on the otherwise mundane. But obviously there are all sorts of narrative prompts that could similarly encode time within a spatial grid, and I would encourage developing other variations. I welcome hearing from those willing to share their versions with me!

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A description of this exercise can be found in this video of my keynote at the International Visual Literacy Association conference at the Toledo Art Museum in 2014
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfQ0V_cWDkI
On my site here: http://spinweaveandcut.com/final-page-and-international-talks/

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